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Mr. WALLIN's
DISCOURSES
ON THE
PARABLE
OF THE
PRODIGAL SON.
AND ON THE
PENITENT WOMAN.

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PRICE THREE SHILLINGS SEWED.

SUPERABOUNDING GRACE

THE FORTNIGHTLY

PENTECOSTAL TRANSCENDENT

EXPERIMENTAL AND THEOLOGICAL

DISCOURSES

PRODUCED BY

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SUPERABOUNDING GRACE,
IN THE FORGIVENESS OF
PENITENT TRANSGRESSORS,
EXEMPLIFIED AND VINDICATED.

B E I N G
D I S C O U R S E S
O N T H E
P A R A B L E
O F T H E
P R O D I G A L S O N.

I N F O U R P A R T S.

A N D

On the WOMAN countenanced by our LORD,
in the House of SIMON the PHARISEE.

By BENJAMIN WALLIN, M. A.

L O N D O N:

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M.DCC.LXXV.

P R E F A C E

SOME men talk much of repentance and remission of sins, as native ideas, which no rational person can be ignorant of. The design of this preface is obvious, and for the most part admitted, but it is not to assist, and perhaps to prove, that has been said to them now and then, that engage the awakened criminal to repent; it cannot intend that the duties of a Christian are to be neglected, without the guilt of his innumerable crimes, without which he must be damned, which is true only when the mind is not improved.



P R E F A C E.

SOME men talk much of repentance and remission of sins, as native ideas, of which no rational person can be ignorant: The design of this presumption is obvious, and for the most part confessed; but it is one thing to assert, and quite another to prove; no man has been able to shew how REASON can engage the awakened criminal to repent; it cannot insure him the pardon of a single transgression, much less of a discharge from the guilt of his innumerable errors, without which he must be undone. From REVELA-

unto

unto life, and its certain connexion with forgiveness.—The law says nothing of repentance to the guilty; it curses every transgressor, and loudly calls for punishment and vengeance; nor could the *placability* of the divine Being be discerned from the works of creation or providence, whereas nothing short of a *certain actual reconciliation* can be a rational or cogent motive to the hope of a sinner, without which he must and will flee the presence of his Judge.

IN the beginning of the present century the adversaries of the Bible seemed to push with all their force against it, but neither the noble birth, fine sense, nor great learning of some who drew their pen in the cause of infidelity, could cover the deceit and pernicious tendency of deism, which has been confuted in so fair and masterly a manner, and
the

the pride, sophistry, and perverseness of its advocates so justly exposed, that nothing considerable has of late been openly and directly attempted against the volume of inspiration; indeed a deistical and licentious spirit increases among us, to an awful and threatening degree, insomuch that, in our profane and dissipated age, those dear sacred writings are treated with scorn and contempt by many, but the enemy is silenced, and formal attacks on the scripture are rare and insignificant.

BUT, leaving these sons of darkness, with a sincere and earnest wish that a gracious God would grant them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth, that they might be saved; thanks be to the Father of mercies, that what the light of nature is unacquainted with is manifested through the gospel, by which these divine blessings we need, are dis-

IV P R E F A C E

covered in the hands of an exalted Saviour. Thus run the glad tidings: "In whom we have redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." The gospel is a ministry of reconciliation, through the satisfaction of the incarnate Son of the Father, "who suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God," for the encouragement of every sensible transgressor, without any limitation or exception whatever: To this some object, but without reason, for the obedience of this divine person in the flesh, unto the death of the cross, is a meritorious cause, equal to the utmost demands of justice, so that the righteousness of God is evident in the dispensation of his pardoning mercy to the penitent, and the Father can as easily forgive millions of the most aggravated transgressions, as the least of all crimes; now, if
infinite

P R E F A C E

infinite wisdom has thus provided for the glory of the divine righteousness and law, in the pardon of sin, what should hinder any penitent transgressor, however vile he may have been, from partaking in his grace? Is it not becoming the Most High to extend his mercy to the greatest rebel on his repentance, provided there is a security for the honour of his government? Would not a wise and good man, when he beholds a fellow-creature going down to the grave in his sins, wish the wretch converted, and plucked from the horrible jaws of everlasting destruction? Who then shall find fault if the Almighty is graciously pleased to forgive him, in a way perfectly consistent with his all glorious perfections, and thereby engage him from sin to himself? Besides, is there an exclusive line in the proclamations of grace? If not, is it decent or charitable to desire a restraint on the heart

PREFACE

heart or hand of a forgiving God, who is able and willing to convert and pardon the basest of men?

THE chief design of the following pages is to illustrate and justify divine mercy bestowed on even very great sinners; with this view a long and famous parable is considered; in the application of which, there may be various sentiments among those who may, nevertheless, unite and rejoice in the truth. I have endeavoured impartially to weigh the sentiments of others, and adhered to, or departed from them, as they appeared to me conformable or not, to the counsel of God, the manifestation of which to the conscience of man, for his conviction, or comfort, and the honour of divine grace, was my real, and sole aim in this attempt; in the prosecution of which, the utmost frankness is used that, through

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through the agency of the Spirit, every one may understand to his profit.

IF, after all, it should be thought that the prodigal, whose character is opened, is rather an emblem of a sinful backslider, than of a newly converted transgressor, by an argument from the greater to the less, it answers my purpose; for, if he who is revolted in a state of grace may be forgiven, much more may a sinner hope for mercy on his first return to God; and it is presumed that a different opinion on the precise intention of the similitude, will not prevent a cordial acquiescence in what is advanced upon it, agreeable to the analogy of faith. As to the penitent woman, it is many years since I delivered a course of sermons on her story, whose case is here stated, and surely this undeniable fact, or instance of superabounding grace, may confirm the idea

I have

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I have given of the parable; and establish the Reader in the true grace of God.

IT may be proper to declare; that in discovering what appears to me the real and natural tendency of those errors, or that spirit of opposition to the truth, which but too much prevails, I am unconscious of the least design against any particular person, society or denomination under a christian profession: Far be it to provoke, or give just cause of offence to any one! neither would I charge on any the consequences of their avowed principles, which they themselves disclaim; but the methods of grace, in the forgiveness of sin, is a subject of too deep and universal concern to admit of any reserve; let the censure fall where it may, it is an article of infinite importance, which demands the utmost freedom,

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dom, in meekness and love, that no one may flatter himself, under a fatal mistake.

SEEING it is in a manner universally admitted that repentance and remission are needful to communion with God, and the comfortable enjoyment of his favour, without which the soul must be for ever miserable, it is surely pertinent and friendly to adjust the notion of these interesting points by the standard of truth. Mankind are liable to wander, through their own imaginations, the suggestions of the tempter, or the subtlety of speculative and erroneous teachers, into a false conception of their spiritual state, which is exceeding dangerous. The article of repentance has been judiciously handled by many, and very lately by a serious and sensible author*, who, I ardently wish the

* The Rev. Charles De Coetlogon's Portraiture of the Christian Penitent, taken from Psalm li. printed by Lewis, and published July, 1775.

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joy of a visible and abundant success. Indeed the same doctrine is touched on in these discourses, but the principal object of my intention is not so much repentance, as the encouragement there is in the gospel for a penitent sinner; may this providential connexion in the period of our publication, unknown to each other, be accompanied with that divine power in the hearts of our Readers, without which neither the elegance of *that* Gentleman, nor *my* simplicity, can avail to the promoting of the kingdom of God.

THERE is reason to fear that too many read sermons in the same careless manner they hear them; hence they are as waters that pass away; forgotten and lost! but the attentive Reader is sometimes at a loss to find an article that has struck him, he wishes to review. It was formerly a custom, not altogether useless,
to

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to note in the margin the principal contents even of a very small volume, nor do I think that we less need these and other helps to the memory, now out of fashion, than those of the the age that is past, have therefore given a kind of direction in the running-title, which for the most part expresses the contents of the page underneath, so that it will be easy to turn back to any particular; and further, as the end of a religious composition is, or ought to be, clearly grounded on the scripture of truth, and to promote the knowledge of the divine will, contained in the Old and New Testament, a table of the passages referred to is subjoined, which it is hoped may also be convenient.

If any critical notice should be taken of this little piece, by those who are of a different persuasion on the subject, the author only

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desires that it may consist with that religious liberty, with which he wishes to see every man possessed, without any human controul, and with true christian candour, there will then be no artful misrepresentation, or partial dealing to lessen a serious attempt for the good of mankind; and as to those who fall in with his view of the divine counsel, it is needless to urge their friendly aid, especially by their prayer for a blessing on the *late*, and it may be the *last*, considerable endeavour in this way, of one, who has been undeservedly honoured, as an instrument of usefulness to the souls of men, and who is on the eve of that day which terminates in a period to every man's labour; till which he trusts in the mercy that has hitherto helped him, to be faithful, and as active as possible, that, through grace, he may finish with joy.

C O N-

C O N T E N T S.

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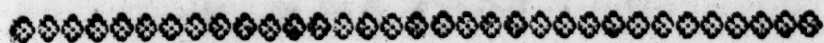
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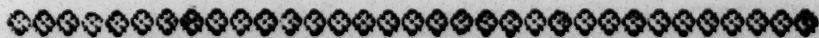


O N T H E
P A R A B L E
O F T H E
P R O D I G A L S O N.

P A R T I.

T H E
Y O U N G E R S O N ' s D I S S I P A T I O N A N D
R U I N .

A N
Exhibition of Man's Apostasy from G O D , and his
S H A M E F U L and P E R I S H I N G Condition by Nature.



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OF THE
PARABLE
OF THE
PRODIGAL SON.

PART I.

THE
YOUNGER SON'S DISSIPATION AND
RUIN.

A
Y
Exhibition of Man's Apostasy from God, and his
degraded and perishing Condition by Nature.

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S E R M O N I.

Luke xv.—from the 11th to the 16th verse inclusive.

And he said, A certain man had two sons :—And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.—And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.—And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land ; and he began to be in want.—And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country ; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.—And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat : and no man gave unto him.

PARABLES are replete with ideas both natural and spiritual, and when duly opened and applied, afford a variety of instruction civil and religious ; they are a kind of moral pictures : in a review of which we are to distinguish the strokes which are purely ornamental from those which are essential ; in a neglect of this some have injudiciouſly ſtrained almoſt every ſentence and word, in theſe elegant parts of ſcripture, to their adopted ſcheme of interpretation, and rather perplexed than ſatisfied the reader.

SEVERAL edifying pieces, on different plans, have been published on this extensive similitude, and yet there is room still further to ascertain and improve so considerable an appearance in sacred writ: an humble attempt of this, it is presumed, can be no just offence, but may, by the blessing of God, prove an advantage to some.

My design is strictly to regard the scope of the place, and aim at a just application of this fine metaphorical draught: In order to this, I shall endeavour to manifest our Saviour's intention by the principal figures that appear, illustrate the scene from scripture and experience, and close with suitable reflections.

It is obvious that the occasion of this parable was the murmuring of the Pharisees, a set of haughty self-righteous men, who were offended at Jesus for associating with sinners, whom they disdained as unholy, as though it was indecent for the Son of God to concern himself with any of the character he came into the world to save. The like spirit prevailed among the unbelieving Jews, who, following their supercilious guides, boasted in Abraham and Moses, and despised others, more especially the Gentiles, whom they were taught to look upon as creatures excluded from the kingdom of heaven: hence they could not endure the thoughts of their conversion;

sion; this conceited and cruel prejudice was so deeply rooted in that generation, that it was some time before the disciples themselves could be reconciled to the preaching of the gospel among the heathen, as appears from their contention with Peter, recorded in Acts xi. So hard is it to be divested of wrong notions, imbibed under a bad education; and so hurtful are prepossessions against the counsel of God, that they tempt the unhappy subjects to reject it from themselves, and to restrain it from others!

IN reply to this ignorant and uncharitable cavil, our Lord, in two preceding short parables, namely that of the *sheep*, and that of the *goat*, justifies his conduct from the reason and practice of men who appear always ready to seek, and to rejoice in the recovery of that which was lost: the freedom they complained of in our Saviour, was therefore, in the sense of mankind, agreeable to the design of his coming, which was not to call the *righteous*, but *sinners* to repentance, on which he tells them, that there was “joy among the angels in heaven,” so that the displeasure they shewed at his condescension and grace was highly unreasonable, and unworthy the character of men who styled themselves the children of God: then comes the allegory, part of which is contained in the verses before us, in which we are presented with a more full and circumstantial view

view of a lost sinner, the reception he meets with on turning to God, and the implacable aversion of self-righteous persons to the mercy bestowed on the penitent: so then the intention of this famous parable, is to display and vindicate the rich and free grace of God, manifested in the pardon of sinners on repentance, from the malice and slander of all who oppose it; and he must be little acquainted with the taste of mankind who need to be told that a like vindication of the gospel is required in every age, our own not excepted, for the like prejudices notoriously prevail in the present generation; it is therefore not impertinent, and I trust may be useful, to consider with care this beautiful and striking remonstrance.

WITH an humble dependence on the Spirit of wisdom and grace, I shall attempt to lay open and improve this design of our Lord, and promise myself a serious and candid attention: it presents a venerable parent and his two only sons; the history of the younger is the principal subject, from whose licentious and wicked course, in the time of his vanity, the parable takes the denomination of the PRODIGAL SON. It is made up of four compartments; namely, the departure and ruin of the prodigal, *his* return to his father, the gracious manner in which he is received, and the high offence it gave his elder brother, who is
not

not to be reconciled to the joyful occasion. Our present concern is with the first partition in the scene; but before we enter on particulars, it is expedient to explain or give a general account of the personal figures that make their appearance; a just idea of whom is to be carried through all our discourse on this copious and interesting subject.

THE principal personages, as already observed, are a certain great man and his only two sons. In the father we have a most amiable character; he is opulent, wise, just and indulgent, which together with his patience, and generous compassion to the penitent youth, who had so greatly abused and offended him, rendered him a fit emblem of the divine Father, unto whom it is generally, and, in my opinion, justly applied; He is the universal parent of his creatures, who largely share in his bounty, under a wise and holy providence; for he is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. [Compare Psalm cxlv. 9. with Mat. ii. 10. and Acts xvii. 28.] But the subject is *grace*, and respects the dispensation of mercy to sinners; a subject supernatural; it proceeds on the "good pleasure which God hath purposed in himself, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Eph. i. 9, 11. He is therefore to be considered as a father in covenant with his chosen, whom he hath redeemed

ONE

deemed by the blood of his Son Jesus Christ, that he might have mercy upon them, consistent with the rights of justice, and the honour of his adorable perfections: a shadow of this was given in the covenant of circumcision with Abraham, and the redemption of literal Israel from Egypt: hence Moses reproves that ungrateful people, Deut. xxxii. 6. "Do ye thus requite the Lord; is he not thy father that bought thee?" The Jews, even while they behaved like the children of the devil, had the vanity to say, "We have one father, even God." But this is the language of a covenant God to the heirs of promise who fear him; "I will be a *father* unto you, and ye shall be my *sons* and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty," 2 Cor. vi. 18.

THE * two sons are by many understood of Jews and Gentiles; the first is supposed to be represented by the elder, and the other by the younger son, and accordingly great pains is taken to make every sentence

* Some interpret this of the first Adam's wilful apostasy, in whose loins all mankind lay, and who indeed was a public federal head to his natural seed. Mankind, say they, may be styled the younger in comparison of angels, they had as it were all that fell to them by creation, given into their hands in Adam, who wasted and lost it by sin; and there is but too much truth in the ruin of mankind, by the apostasy and transgression of our first and great parent; but with submission, these

tence in the account of the prodigal to agree with the state of the Gentiles; I am far from being fond of an unbeaten path, yet cannot but think that this idea of the parable is too much confined, for, however the temper of the Jews, which was the occasion, is censured, the same pride and prejudices is more or less evident in the world, and among formal professors, wherever the gospel is preached. In this respect the Jews and their leaders were not the only sinners; far from it; their uncharitable and presumptuous spirit, in contradiction to the grace of God, is but the natural bent of the carnal mind, under the like temptations. Narrow schemes are always to be avoided, as tending to amuse the reader from considering himself as the object addressed, by which evasion we too often read the scripture in vain, but the divine oracles are not of private interpretation, and what is here written is to be applied in every generation to the end of the world. That God saves fallen man *freely* by his *grace*, that he just-

two sons are *natural* brethren, and the trial God put man under in the first covenant, though wise, just and good, was of his sovereign pleasure, and not at the instance of the creature, which was the case of the prodigal; in these, and other capital points, this mystical scheme is not at all suitable to the principal circumstances of the design in our view. There are other whimsical conceptions about this divine figure, with which I shall not trouble the reader.

tifieth the *ungodly*; that he has not the least regard to the *merit* of the subject in conferring new covenant blessings, but hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and, in short, that Christ came into the world to save *sinners*, according to the tenor of the word, is still a stone of stumbling, and rock of offence. Who is unacquainted with the present clamour of many against the sovereignty of God in the dispensation of his mercy, or can be a stranger to the subtle attempts that are continually made under specious pretences to pervert the gospel of Christ? I shall, by divine assistance, open this parable in a free and practical way, that the mercy of a sin pardoning God, through the blood of his Son, may appear in its glory and righteousness for the direction and encouragement of sensible sinners; and if any one, into whose hands these papers may fall, should be so conceited and presumptuous as to neglect or despise the salvation of God, it will be my honour and joy to find this endeavour conduce to his cordial repentance.

THESE are the characters that prevail throughout the whole scene, and I humbly apprehend that they represent Jehovah the Father, and all unregenerate men, between whom one line is drawn, by which they are divided into two classes, namely, those who exalt themselves in their *own* works, as did the Jews,
and

and those who are ignorant and prophane, as were the Gentiles; and to this day, all mankind may be justly considered under the like division, for amidst the various forms and sentiments that abound, each individual in his natural state, is either of the libertine or self-righteous cast, and more or less answers to one or other of the brothers in the parable: the junior of these now stands before us, whose circumstances and conduct we proceed to consider, and apply in the manner proposed: and of him the following particulars deserve our attention.

I. His *age*, or rather his *youth*; he is the younger son: and behold what a stripling! conceited in the ignorance and vanity of his mind, he is eager to be independent and at liberty, which only served to shew that he was a slave to corruption, as will hereafter appear. Among youthful lusts, we are exhorted to flee, there is none more predominant than a thirst after liberty, a passion which is ever attended with a conceit of our own understanding. In like manner this forward spark thinks he has discretion to dispose of himself, and therefore is no longer content to continue under the eye of his excellent and venerable father; he does not complain of any ill treatment, but, alas, the excellency and kindness of parents have no weight with impious children, who will follow their own inclinations, yea, by how

much the more orderly and wise a man's house is conducted, by so much the more disagreeable to him } who is determined to gratify a vicious disposition ; thus the younger son, void of the understanding which ripen years might have furnished him with, and impatient of restraint from the pleasures of life, comes to his father ; and, What is his errand ?

II. " FATHER, says he, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." Profligate children who would force themselves away from their wife and affectionate parents, are sometimes unnatural and rude in their behaviour ; being hardened in sin they are incapable of reverence for God or man ; yet, I must own, that there appears not to me a sufficient ground for representing this application as an insolent one ; it is true, when youth are dissatisfied with home, and are for hurrying from under the wing of a wise and affectionate parent, without any reason, which is supposed in this case, it is no instance of filial regard, and argues but a bad disposition ; but there is nothing unseemly in the language of this son to his father, I therefore cannot approve of this turn ; he is foolish, ungrateful, and wicked enough on the face of the account, nor is there any need to aggravate his folly, in order to make him an example for the warning of others. This young man is tired of the discipline of his father's house, and appears to solicit the possession

feſſion of what he apprehended his portion, with a view to gratify the baſeſt of luſts, which he afterwards did, to his ruin; but what is there in the diction or the manner of his requeſt that favours of pride and indecency? “ Father, ſays he, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.” Family ſubſtance you know is differently circumſtanced; ſometimes it conſiſts in patrimonial eſtate, to the inheritance of which the children are legally intitled, without an abſolute dependence on the will of the father, but dutiful children have a kind of natural right to enjoy the ſubſtance of their parents under certain limitation, and ſuch may be aſſured of a will in their favour. This precipitant youth, with all his pride and preſumption, is not repreſented as claiming more than he thought belonging to him; he might indeed look for more than his due, and it is plain that he aſked and obtained more than he deſerved, or had wiſdom to improve; but here is no injuſtice or arrogance in his demand; the * original words are becoming and modeſt, and carry in them no more than a deſire that his father would deliver, and aſſign over, or put him in poſſeſſion of that part of his ſubſtance to which he had a natural or equitable right: in a word, the folly of this ſon lay not in demanding more than his due, or in any unbecoming manner of ad-

* δός μοί τὸ σπιβάλλον μέρος τ' οὐσίας.

dress to his parent, but in his urging this matter before the time, that he might live as he listed ; herein, I say, his folly is manifest, and he is a warning to the rising generation in every age, lest being left to themselves they hasten into destruction. For,

III. His father complies ; calling for his elder son, for that is naturally supposed, “ he divided unto them his living.” This at first view is truly astonishing : strange that a wise and good man should comply with a request so unreasonable, and so evidently dangerous to his own dear son, for whom he appears to have a very strong affection ; was it not in his power with justice to have denied it, and saved him from misery and shame ? Here note by the way, that as it is absurd to make every sentence in a parable essential to the design, it is no less dangerous to draw every fact it exhibits into an example ; for instance, in the article before us, we are to remember the disparity there is between an earthly parent and our heavenly Father, whose conduct is here represented. Certainly this is not a pattern for men ; it would be sinful in a human parent to satiate the lawless, however passionate, desire of his too forward son perceiving his vicious inclination, and the ruin he is about to bring upon himself ; not to prevent it by withholding to his utmost the means of the guilt and misery of his child would be unnatural and criminal ;
yet,

yet, alas, it is too often seen that fond parents indiscreetly, and for want of due attention or fortitude of mind gratify their offspring to their destruction in this world, and it may in that which is to come ! O that their folly and unhappiness might be a caution to others ! Nor are we to conclude from the behaviour of the father in the parable, that parents are to deprive themselves of their living, or divide all their substance among their children, and leave themselves destitute ; this is against the dictate of nature and providence, a folly by which some have laid their children under a temptation to despise, if not to insult them, which is the common lot of those who are weak enough to act so unreasonable a part. It is becoming parents, as they have an opportunity, to lay up for their children, and to part with what they can spare when it may be to their advantage, but to reduce their own needful supply, or render themselves incapable of future assistance if required, is an egregious, and sometimes a fatal mistake, and there is reason to conclude that this step is always repented ; a conduct not in the least countenanced by the representation before us ; for the pronoun *his* is a supplement, and the words literally run, “ he divided to them substance ;” i.e. he gave them each an equitable portion on which they might with œconomy live, ‘ he gave them, says * one, his chief stock

* Dodderidge on the place.

of money, reserving the house and estate in his hands.' This is certain that the parable is far from representing the father, as dividing between his sons all his estate of every kind; he appears after this generous distribution to be in possession of his mansion and lands, with his servants about him, and capable of relieving, yea, of enriching the prodigal on his return. They tempt divine providence, who, through covetousness, keep back from their children what may be useful; but they who divest themselves to clothe them with pride, and to gratify their vain inclinations, are still more blame-worthy. It is true, this youth was indulged to his ruin, but this is not to be copied by us; it may become the Almighty Sovereign of the universe, who is the Father intended, with whom all things are possible, and who can reduce a rebel to repentance at his pleasure, but it is unlawful for us to withhold the restraint in our power from those who would destroy themselves; so threatening to morality itself it is to strain, or misapply metaphorical passages of scripture. We now proceed,

IV. To consider what ensued. The young rake no sooner obtained his request, but he gathers all together.—This is the language of his heart: “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” Thoughtless youth,

youth, turning an estate or goods into cash, with a view to spend on his lusts, without any restraint, as if there would be no end to his portion, not considering how soon it may be wasted, and leave him in misery and shame! Alas, how many such deluded young men are to be seen among the heirs of the rich in every generation!—But the prodigal, the more effectually to answer his purpose, *took his journey into a far country, his journey* which he had premeditated, to the place and company where, and with whom, he determined to take his full swing of sensual delight; into a distant land, that, being from under the eye of his father, or any who were acquainted with his family, education or original character, he might be out of the reach of every kind of check in his intended licentiousness; as it seems he departs without counsel or leave, or the least grateful acknowledgment to his generous and indulging parent, which I think is the first visible instance of indecency in his conduct towards him; and what is the consequence? We are immediately told, *there he wasted his substance with riotous living.* Having got to his wished for liberty, and jovial companions, he loses no time, and spares no cost, but goes on profusely in every criminal and expensive gratification, with harlots, as appears from verse 30; for the charge is admitted in the father's reply to his brother, who accused him;

and if with harlots, no doubt with the concomitant vices of luxury and gaming, and every other excess implied in riotous living, which includes all kind of intemperance and uncleanness. In this shameful and wicked manner lived the extravagant youth, till he had spent every farthing of his substance. Would to God there were no like instances of folly and madness in the present age; but, ah, how many grasp at their fortunes to gratify their lusts! how many of the rising generation, in a short course of sinful pleasures, scatter what their industrious ancestors have gathered, and are abandoned to disgrace and a miserable destruction! Nor is this any matter of astonishment in a nation where many great people (if a modern * estimate is just) are notoriously and generally given to the most profligate and effeminate vices, insomuch that it can with truth be asserted that money is rapaciously sought after, as the means of supporting a life of dissipation and vanity. But,

V. UNDER these circumstances the prodigal falls into distress: *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land.* See the end of a voluptuous spendthrift! Poverty comes on him

* Estimate of the manners and principles of the times. Vol. 2. p. 74.

like an armed man, he is exposed to the utmost misery in a time of general calamity, having nothing to relieve him. A famine is deplorable, but especially to the poor; and to be poor through extravagance and wickedness, is not only a disgrace, but sinful beyond all expression! Yet, alas, how many bring a famine on themselves in like manner, by wasting their substance through intemperance and vice.—A mighty famine was in the land; there are degrees of scarcity under which the poor of a nation or country may more or less groan; but this was a total and universal famine, which answers to the design; for a miserable and perishing state is intended, and the case of this man is carried to the highest possible pitch: the want of necessaries in deep poverty, brought on by criminal indulgence, is as deplorable a condition as can well be conceived of; the guilty sufferer has nothing to support him in life; and how can he endure the prospect of death, and judgment to come?—It is added, *And he began to be in want*, i. e. of bread to satisfy his hunger, and in danger of starving. In this wretched plight observe,

VI. THE method he takes; *he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine, and he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat.* Infatuated wretch! for aught appears, he is

under no external restraint ; he is not represented a person confined in prison, as a debtor or criminal ; what then should hinder his returning back whence he came, to a land of plenty, and to his father's house, where there was bread enough and to spare ? He had nothing left, and how could he expect to subsist without a single farthing, in the midst of a dreadful famine ? Would not a man in his senses under these circumstances, being at liberty, have fled from this land of death for his life, without any delay ?—He afterwards came to himself, as will shortly appear, and then we shall see that he acted this reasonable part, and escaped the final and utter destruction with which he was threatened ; yea, and still more, he obtained every thing needful to his honour and happiness, but at present nothing was farther from his thoughts, or at least his inclinations than the only way of relief ; he flatters himself that he shall be able to live by his own labour, or the assistance of others ; and therefore instead of returning, he stoops to this mean and slavish employment ; he had lived like a swine, wallowing in the mire of his filthy lusts, and now he is a keeper of swine.—Some expositors consider the prodigal here as representing the libertine in his drunkenness, whoredom and other acts of intemperance and uncleanness, but, with submission, this by no means agrees with his present situation ; his riot is over ; he is now in a
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state of necessity; indeed without a change in his mind, were his circumstances altered, so as to put it in his power, he might, and it is probable he would have returned to his former vile course, but at present he is incapable of it, being in a destitute and starving condition, and only seeking for bread; this he does by a servile subjection to the basest drudgery, and by catching at any thing, however disagreeable or unsatisfying; all which we shall find answer to the folly of sinners in distress, who are ignorant of the only remedy, set forth in the gospel; but his submitting to this service for the preservation of life, can be no part of his immoral character; *He would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat*, but, alas, it was in vain. And,

FINALLY, to compleat his misery, he is friendless. *No man gave unto him.* While the thoughtless gay youth has any thing to spend he is flattered and caressed by those who devour him, but when his substance is gone they disdain him. A companion in iniquity will not be a helper in misery, and men reduced by their vices are universally despised and forsaken; and indeed where a famine prevails, who is not in want? What hand can relieve? O tragical scene! A young man void of understanding, being left to himself, in a ruined condition! What less than a miracle can save him? Now, this allegory
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in general represents the shameful and perishing condition of an awakened sinner, who having wandered from God, is sunk by his iniquity, and has destroyed himself. This is the sad case of man, since the fall, by nature and practice; we all like sheep have gone astray in Adam, after whom each one from his birth, being a servant of sin, turns to his own way, and if seized with painful convictions, under which he is threatened with death, being ignorant of the true cause of his misery, and the only way of salvation, flatters himself that he can live by some means short of a change, or without an interest in Christ, who alone is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins. But the spiritual application and improvement of this striking figure will be the subject of an ensuing discourse.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N I I.

Luke xv.—from the 11th to the 16th verse inclusive.

And he said, A certain man had two sons, &c.

TH E S E verses present us with a young man in a passion for liberty and pleasure, requesting of his father his portion. This obtained, he immediately collects it, and hastens away to a country far distant from his native abode, and there quickly spends his all in a lewd course of life. Such instances, alas, are but too common in every age and place ! When his substance is gone a famine ensues, by which he is reduced to the utmost distress. Now, what sensible person in this sad condition, and under no external restraint, which is the case of the prodigal, would not have instantly returned ? But nothing is farther from his thoughts ; instead of this

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reasonable and only method of relief, he hires himself to a citizen of the country, and submits to the drudgery of tending his swine; in this sordid employment, being almost starved, in vain he endeavours to satisfy himself with the trash on which the beasts in his keeping were fed, and to complete his misery, he is entirely abandoned. No man pitied him in these deplorable circumstances. Such is the end of profane libertines, who spend their patrimony in criminal pleasures; it is often seen that they are ruined in this world, and, which is infinitely worse, in appearance, many are cut off in their sins, and perish for ever in that which is to come! The Lord convince those unhappy gay persons of their folly and danger, who, under a pretence of rejoicing in their youth, lay the reins on the neck of their lusts, that seeing the misery and shame which is hastening on them, they may repent and be saved; but as observed in our former discourse, the intention of the REVOLTED MAN, is walking after the course of this world, in the kingdom of Satan, that spirit which worketh in the children of disobedience, and the similitude holds in the following particulars.

I. THAT he lusts after liberty to live at his own carnal will. It is the pride and presumption of man to be independent of God, and left to dispose of himself as he pleases. Many things bespeak this
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haughty and vain disposition: Witness, a general discontent in the station in which providence has placed us, a covetous laying up treasure to ourselves, impatience under restraints, and a secret or open endeavour to be free of controul; yea, and the murmurings of which we are conscious, and sometimes discover against the Lord and his ways; these loudly proclaim that man would, if possible, withdraw from the government of the most high, and be his own keeper. And what else is the language of the pains some men take to depreciate the law, and to deny, or at least extenuate the obligation to moral or evangelical obedience? Why also is the will and power of the creature exalted, and whence those impious complaints of the Sovereignty assumed in the dispensations of providence and grace, as though it was an injury to man, and unworthy of God? Is this any other than to cast away the cords, and break the bands of allegiance asunder, and set up for ourselves in opposition to the will of our Creator and Lord? In short, the doctrine, temper, and conduct of the world, answer to the words of the prodigal, *Father, give me the goods which falleth unto me*, only not quite so decent. So depraved and rebellious is apostate man! Man, in the kingdom of darkness, and the vanity of his mind cannot understand, or think it his honour and happiness,

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pinefs, to be controuled by his Maker, who hath an unalienable right to govern him. Conceit of his own self-fufficiency, and enmity againft his only right Sovereign, whose holinefs and law are in direct opposition to the will of his flefh, prompt him to any fituation in which he may act without fear or restraint. No wonder,

2. THAT as the prodigal went into a country far diftant from his father, the natural man will depart from God to the utmoft of his power. “Behold, thou haft fpoken, and done evil things as thou couldeft.” Jer. iii. 5. Some apply this to the revolt of Adam by his firft and fatal tranfgreffion; but the courfe of this world feems rather intended; the unregenerate finner, like the people complained of, Jer. v. 23. hath a revolting and rebellious heart; he is revolted and gone; to the Almighty he faith, “Depart from me, I defire not the knowledge of thy ways.” Job xxi. 14. However fome boast of the goodnefs of their heart, and their natural inclination to virtue; it is in direct contradiction to the divine testimony, and univerfal experience; all things fhew that fallen man is in a ftate of alienation from God, as diftant and oppofite to his nature and will, as the eaft from the weft, or as darknefs to light; now fuch as the creature naturally is, if left to himfelf, his practice will be: therefore every

individual under the dominion of sin will as much as possible withdraw himself from the presence of the Lord, whose spotless justice he dreads, and whose holy eye is a check on his impetuous desires.

BUT, vain man, whither canst thou flee from the immense Being, who fills heaven and earth? This retirement of the transgressor from the Lord is rather spiritual, and in the mind, than local and bodily; not but that in some instances the profane and licentious have removed their situation to avoid the reproofs of God's word, and the company of his ministers and people, whose warnings, counsel and good conversation are a continual witness against them; as frequently the faithful have left their dear native country, and every thing precious in life, to enjoy the means of grace, and their fellowship in the ordinances of Christ; in like manner, sometimes a profligate sinner, by going out from the family or place where the fear of God is, may, in a sense, locally retreat from his presence, to avoid interruption in his libertine course; "But the wicked like not to retain the knowledge of God in their thoughts." Psalm x. 4. Thoughts of God will arise in the mind of a transgressor, but he endeavours to banish them, and every idea of confidence in him, or subjection to his will, to which he is habitually averse; hence the sabbaths of the Lord are a wea-

rinefs, and the licentious multitude, not restrained by the civil magiftrate, but rather led afide by the example of the great, fpend *the holy day* in riot and wantonnefs. This, alas, is the fhameful courfe of our own chriitian nation; for though, blessed be God, his thoufands are gathered together before him, yet ten thoufands, even the bulk of the people, of every rank, fcatter abroad in purfuit of fenfual delights, by which they openly declare that they know no other God than their belly, to the difgrace of our holy profeflion. Thus through unbelief, and indulging the flefh, the heart of the finner departeth more and more from the Lord, Jer. xvii. 5. till he is at the utmoft diftance, and, it may be, flatters himfelf that he is out of his fight; and who, in the time of his ignorance and vanity, hath not in like manner, more or lefs, banifhed the Almighty from his thoughts, and as much as in him lay fhunned the contemplation of his majefty and glory? Again,

3. THIS fimilitude fhews that the moft exuberant bounty or providential kindnefs of the Almighty, are infufficient to the conversion of a finner; they will not turn him from his vicious purfuit after vanity, or engage his heart to the Lord. Indeed the goodnefs of God leadeth to repentance, Rom. ii. 4. But apoftate man will defpife it; he is naturally and perversely fixed on fulfilling the defires of the flefh,
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nor can any thing move him, short of a change in his mind. The wonderful kindness and generosity of the father in the parable had no good effect on his libertine son; it did not in the least incline him to dwell in his presence, or shake his resolution for the bad course of life on which he was set; on the contrary, having obtained his request, you see that he hastens away, and spends all he had, in the most shameful and criminal manner: thus ungrateful and vile is the transgressor; and this is the habit of him who lies in the kingdom of darkness. Indeed every natural man is not squandering his worldly estate in the character of a rake, or running to the same excess of riot in which some waste their substance, and are quickly reduced to poverty and shame, but every unconverted man is in reality a servant of sin, his life, health, faculties, limbs, liberty, riches, learning, honour, and in a word, whatever he is indulged with, by nature or providence, is, in some form, devoted to the will of the flesh; so that corruption availeth itself of all he is possessed of, and whatever he asks is with a view to consume it on his lusts. James iv. 3. for what he obtains is laid up to fulfil them, Rom. vi. 19. If an earthly parent strips himself naked to gratify the unreasonable desire of a disobedient child, who is restless under his wing, in order to reclaim him, he is greatly deceived, his vanity will grow on this fond indulgence, and prompt him

him to insolence. In like manner, if our heavenly Father was to lay out the fulness of the earth on a single transgressor, such is the ingratitude and villainess of the flesh, it would be so far from turning the rebel, that it would rather harden him in his iniquity. Instances may be produced in which poverty and external distress have proved the happy occasion of convincing a sinner, and conducing to his conversion, but, in whom did God ever work repentance by means of the riches and pleasures of life? many have been ruined, but none ever saved by worldly prosperity. And further,

4. IN this emblem we behold that the joy of a sinner is transitory, and in the end there is bitterness. How fleeting the sport of this youth, and what miseries ensue! Thus the pleasures of sin are but for a season. Heb. xi. 25. "As the crackling of thorns is the laughter of the fool in his folly." Eccles. vii. 6. A blaze and away, and he lies down in sorrow; alas, judgment is certain and near, when the scornful transgressor shall be filled with his ways! Sometimes the libertine, after a short run of riot and wantonness, in the deepest poverty, and under the most painful and loathsome diseases, with a wounded conscience, in all appearance goes down to the grave in despair. What tongue can describe the horrors of his guilty mind on a review of his life, and in the prospect

prospect of the everlasting torments that await the workers of iniquity ! Yea, the terrors of the Almighty under a conviction of sin in them, who at length obtain true repentance, are not to be fully expressed, but in case the transgressor is left in the hardness and impenitence of his heart to be insensible, and so escapes this fearful expectation of vengeance, the judge is at the door ; he is therefore nigh unto cursing, and will soon be overtaken. This is the portion of the man who makes provision for the flesh, and is spending himself in the service of sin ; awhile he rejoices, but his triumph is short, for he is quickly in distress ; if saved by grace, unspeakable anguish and shame for the most part attend his recovery ; but if he dies in his guilt, he sinks into hell, the torments of which are unspeakable and eternal ! Moreover,

5. It appears in this draught that a sinner, when threatened under legal conviction, will naturally endeavour to save himself, and satisfy his conscience, short of repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When the abandoned youth in the parable began to be in want, did he think of returning to his father, as afterwards, when he came to himself ? No ; he seeks relief where he is, and wishes to be satisfied even with the base food of the beasts he had engaged to watch over ; in like manner
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the transgressor in his distress, void of any motive to the repentance required in the gospel, will labour after life, in a neglect of the great salvation.

SOME think that the prodigal's feeding swine in the fields is emblematical of an awakened sinner in his recourse to sensual delights, that he may stifle conviction, and amuse himself from the terror of his Judge; and it is often the case that the guilty endeavour to forget their misery in the pleasures of life, by which, for a season, they ward off the pains of reflection; but, as formerly observed, this application will not agree with the present state of this foolish young man; his capacity for riot and wantonness is over, we now behold him reduced, and in circumstances incompatible with a gratification of those lusts, in the fulfilling of which he had spent all his substance: he is now in a starving condition; and what analogy between a man destitute of the necessities of life, and perishing with hunger, and a person in affluent circumstances, carousing in sensual pleasure, to drown the sorrows of a guilty conscience?

A LATE * worthy writer, well known for his labours on metaphorical scripture, makes swine in

* Keach on this parable, p. 98.

this place symbolical of profane men and women, and others consider the passage as expressive of a transgressor wallowing in the mire of his carnal lusts; but, with submission, this notion is likewise improper, and has no better foundation in the parable than the other. It is true, we are told that the infatuated youth would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat *; but he is not said to feed *with* swine, as though swine were his companions, but to *feed swine*, i. e. to tend on the herd of these creatures; I humbly apprehend that the prodigal's joining to a citizen, and being employed in feeding his swine, if any thing more than a mere illustration on the parable, stands in connection with his attempting to satisfy himself with their husks, to shew that a sinner under mere legal conviction in dread of punishment, being unacquainted with the gospel, is prone to seek life in his own works; he would fain support and satisfy himself,

* Some make the husks false doctrines, which are as chaff to the wheat of sound gospel truth, nor is it uncommon for awakened sinners, till enlightened into the true grace of God, to seek their relief in the doctrines of men. This opinion seems rather more just than that before mentioned; for though *Κερατῖων*, rendered *husk* in the text, doth not strictly signify chaff, but rather wild fruit, yet the word being compared to good seed, will by analogy justify a comparison of spurious errors with that which is bad.

and therefore eagerly grasps at any scheme which flatters him with attaining righteousness this way, however unreasonable and vain. It is a melancholy truth, but we see many under the christian dispensation, like the poor blinded Jews, ignorant of God's righteousness, determined, if possible, to set up one of their own, in opposition to that set forth in the gospel: but the truth is, that however pierced with painful conviction, and in earnest about their salvation, which is more than multitudes are who hear the word daily, they are still proud and self-sufficient, or at least not convinced of their lost condition, and the absolute necessity of an interest in Christ; hence nothing is farther from their thoughts, than returning, with frank confession of their sin and unrighteousness, to a reconciled God, who will abundantly pardon, and accordingly, in compassion to them who are ignorant and out of the way, hath issued many gracious proclamations, as with the voice of a trumpet by which thousands have been called off from a fruitless pursuit after life: Thus, Isa. lv. 1. "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." Finally,

6. WE see that when the sinner is perfectly convinced of his deplorable state, and finds himself
impotent,

impotent, he can obtain no relief from any other creature. When the prodigal began to be in want, *no man gave unto him.* In like manner the self-condemned ruined transgressor is friendless: in vain he looks about him for an helper, refuge fails; no man cares for his soul: to whom shall he flee? Shall he ascend up to heaven, or go down to hell? or shall he traverse this earthly globe, in its utmost extent or circumference, who shall clothe him or bind up his wounds? Are his eyes up to heaven? behold, there dwell an innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect, in their robes, at the throne of God and the Lamb; but the righteousness of the latter is not of themselves, and that of the former neither suited to the want of a human transgressor, nor more than sufficient to their own perfection and happiness. The damned in hell cannot relieve him, they are already perished in their sins, and prisoners of justice, chained to the tribunal of God, from whence they are doomed to be cast into the lake of fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. And, who among the sons of the earth can furnish the blind, miserable, naked culprit, who sees himself exposed to everlasting destruction, with the righteousness and grace he stands in need of? The world lies in wickedness, and all mankind in the same condition with himself. Does the heavy-laden sinner meet with a man in his natural state, who is thoughtless

of eternity? can *he* have compassion on the soul of his neighbour, who is ready to perish? will he not shun him, or rather scoff at his fear and distress? where then shall he turn? Is a convinced transgressor at hand? Lo, he is in the same condemnation, and dilemma with himself, a fellow criminal, concluded under sin, and crying out; What must I do to be saved? He can only moan with him, and is more likely to increase, than to alleviate his sorrow. But it may be there appears one that is faithful; a believer in Christ, yea a skilful minister of his gospel: is not this very promising? Here is one that can sympathize with him, pray earnestly for him, and direct his poor soul from the word to the only refuge of sinners; but this man has no grace to bestow, nor can he communicate in any degree towards his deliverance from wrath, or his acceptance with God. Papists vainly talk of a redundancy of merit in themselves, or the church, but no man, no minister, none of the faithful, however advanced in holiness, and full of good works, either in a private or social capacity, can contribute a single mite towards furnishing the guilty with a justifying righteousness. So then wherever the afflicted and miserable wretch turns his eyes, there is no help for him; no creature in heaven, none upon earth, strictly speaking, can do any thing to save him, or afford him bread for the soul; he must perish with hunger,

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if he is not a partaker in Christ: thanks be to God, he hath so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that "whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life!". John iii. 16. Then, come, O thou perishing sinner, to Jesus, for, "all that the Father hath given him, shall come unto him." And, he that is faithful and true hath declared, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." John vi. 37.

HERE ends the first scene of this copious parable, in which the sinner is exhibited in a natural state, and that both in his original stupor, and under the awakenings of conscience. We behold him a conceited revolting creature; proud, self-sufficient, and perverse, making provision to fulfil the lusts of the flesh, and wallowing in the mire of sin, till overtaken with sorrow, and on the verge of destruction. In his distress he has no inclination to repent, but flatters himself he shall by some means or other sustain, which in vain he attempts; no relief can be obtained from any quarter whatever. In like manner it is frequently seen that under painful convictions of sin, the subject unacquainted with the salvation of God, is out of the way in seeking for life! a sorrowful, yet promising sight, it being usually followed with a saving change, and conversion to God, as will hereafter be seen.

AND,

AND, is this the disposition or habit of man? Doth he long to be independent of God, and, left to himself, will he depart from the Almighty as far as he is able? will he give loose to his wanton and filthy desires till entirely exhausted, and when overtaken with calamities, though in a measure sensible of his misery, is repentance far from his thoughts, and is he prone to a vain pursuit after life, in a neglect of the salvation in Jesus? Then, supernatural grace is certainly needful; and, what becomes of the boasted free will and power of man? Under these circumstances, the sinner is totally incapable of turning to God; the eyes of his understanding must be enlightened before he can have any notion of saving himself by a genuine and cordial repentance, and for that reason, could no other be assigned for his impotence, it is certain he cannot repent. If this divine picture is just, and the sinner is really in the state represented; if indeed he has no motive in himself to repent till a change, and he comes to himself, as laid out in the parable, how is it possible that he shall take one step towards returning to the Lord? Nothing therefore can be more inconsistent with the spiritual condition of the unregenerate, than the natural ability of an apostate creature for that repentance unto life, with which the pardon of sin stands connected in the gospel of Christ. A rational creature who has no idea of, or inclination to repentance,
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by reason of insuperable prejudices against it, or from a presumption of being saved in some other way, can never be supposed to repent of himself; it is morally impossible he should.

BEWAIL then, my soul, the fatal transgression! "By one man sin entered into the world," and the whole human race was reduced to these deplorable circumstances of guilt and corruption. How mischievous that act of treason and rebellion by which Adam, our federal parent, fell from his integrity! His tainted posterity, if grace prevent not, are utterly ruined; their righteousness and strength are departed for ever! Being impotent and void of spiritual life, and left to themselves, they eternally perish!

BEHOLD, with compassion, the impenitent transgressor in his state of rebellion against the most high. O the folly and madness of his way, the shame and danger that attends him! View him under legal conviction, alas, he is labouring in vain; filled with distress, and encompassed with darkness, he meets with nothing but disappointment and sorrow, and without a change he must die in his sins, and be miserable for ever! "Remember, beloved, you yourselves were some time darkness, who now are light in the Lord." In the bowels of Jesus be earnest for their souls, who still lie in the kingdom of satan, peradventure your
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cries may be heard, and the Lord may have mercy upon them ; so shall they recover themselves from the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

AND, are convictions of judgment to come so painful in this life, and the awakened subject helpless and ruined ? How fearful the state of those who are cut off in their sins, they lift up their eyes and cry out in despair, where hope never comes, and the ears of many are eternally shut, Luke xvi. 24. If a near view of the miserable death, which is the wages of sin, is so terrible, what must be the state of the damned, who are covered with darkness ; and dying for ever ! O the anguish and horror with which they will hear that soul-rending sentence, in the great day of judgment : “ Depart, ye cursed ; ” then, alas, they shall recollect their sinful departures from the Lord, and the pains they once took to withdraw from his sight ; as a sword, it will pierce through their souls, the wounds of which will torment them, to the endless days of eternity.

THANKS be to God there is hope in this life ; the case is not desperate, the vilest rebel is encouraged to repent. O the rich and superabundant grace in Christ Jesus, according to which the penitent sinner, notwithstanding his innumerable and
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aggravated transgressions, yea, and it may be his contempt of the gospel, is nevertheless pardoned, “ for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plentiful redemption.”

AND now, my dear Reader, seriously reflect on thy state : Art thou in thy native apostate condition, either of a licentious or pharisaical cast, how wonderful the grace, that thou art yet on this side eternity, and not wandered into hell, beyond hope of recovery ! Let the patience and mercy of the Lord be improved ; unless thou repent, they will certainly increase thy future condemnation ; but, hast thou obtained repentance unto life ? thine obligations to love and to serve him are deep and eternal : then join thyself to him ; enter his courts ; bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar, that he may have the glory of his grace, through thine obedience of faith, from the lips of those who love his salvation.

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aggravated transgressions, yes, and it may be his con-
script of the gospel, is nevertheless pardoned, for
with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenti-
fuous redemption."

And now, my dear Reader, seriously reflect on the
fact: Art thou in thy native opposite condition,
either of a sinner or of a saint? Art thou wonder-
ing at the fact that thou art on this side eternity,
and not on the other side? Art thou wondering
at the power and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ?
Art thou repenting, they will certainly direct thee
to the condemnation; but, had thou obtained re-
pentance unto life? Think of it, and I have said to
thee that the Lord is merciful, and that he will
show mercy to the penitent; but, if thou art not
repentant, thou art in danger of being cast
into the lake of fire. To the point of the altar, that he may hear thy prayer
of his grace, through the mediation of his Son,
the life of those who have believed."



T H E

PRODIGAL, in his right Mind,

RESOLVES TO RETURN.

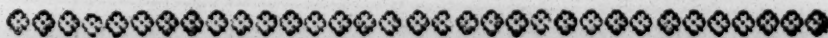
A N E M B L E M

Of the convinced SINNER's Resolution to repent
and turn unto G O D.

By which is illustrated

The Necessity of REGENERATION, and the Nature
of C O N V E R S I O N.

P A R T I I.



2000 2001 2002

PRODIGAL, A D. Light Mind.

1947-1948

S E R M O N III.

Luke xv.—17, 18, 19 verses inclusive.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger!—I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee----And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

WE left the dissipated youth in a melancholy and dangerous state. Having wandered from his father, and shamefully spent all his portion, in a time of sore famine, he lay in a starving condition, without a friend to assist him, yet he fondly imagines that by some means he may be able to support, and therefore has no inclination to depart, though a continuance

tinuance in his present situation must be fatal ! Thus man, who is revolted from God, and destroyed by sin, convinced and terrified, being ignorant of the divine righteousness, would fain save himself, short of repentance, which, alas ! is hid from his eyes ! Under this infatuation the transgressor is not to be moved by the most severe trial, nor will he turn back to escape, though destruction is at hand ; so that without a wonderful and speedy alteration he must inevitably perish ! But thanks be to God, his case is not desperate ; the Almighty can open his heart, and draw the rebel to his feet at his pleasure, an emblem of which is before us. The scene is now changed !—This abandoned young man, hitherto insensible of his wretched condition, on a sudden, comes to himself.

BEHOLD, the wretch is alone, except the swine he is feeding : No man is with him ; indeed the father and his servants are occasionally mentioned, once and again, but their presence is reserved to a future exhibition, in which many capital figures will be seen : At present the younger son only appears, or rather his mind is disclosed, in which we find a surprising alteration ; his external circumstances are exactly the same as before, but wide and happy the difference in his understanding, and the judgment he forms of himself : the man who but now lay under
a de-

a deception, secure in the utmost danger of a miserable end, far from the thought of leaving the country in which he was dying, instantly awakes, reflects, and reasons with himself, and being persuaded of his deplorable state, on a distant prospect of relief, resolves to arise and go to his father!

IN surveying this agreeable and interesting piece, the following particulars strike us; namely,

An evident and wonderful change in the man.

The condition he finds himself in.

What occurs to his mind,

His reasoning on the case.

A resolution to return, and

In what manner he determines to present himself to his offended parent.

FIRST, here is a manifest and astonishing change, "*When he came to himself.*" A just idea of the image, and its admirable fitness to the design, depends on the sense in which the prodigal is supposed to recover; it is therefore of importance to settle this point. Now a person may be said to come to himself in different respects: for instance, when the animal spirits that have sunk, or retired, on any occasion, return to a lively and brisk circulation, as those who recover from a swoon; thus Jacob, in unbelief, fainted

at the report of his sons concerning Joseph their brother, Gen. 45. 26, 27, but at the sight of the waggons which were to convey his family into Egypt, the good old patriarch revived. In like manner, Sampson's spirit came again when he drank water out of the jaw which God had prepared, Judges xv. 19. and thus also persons ready to perish have been frequently recovered by a timely supply; and accordingly the rich, among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, when a famine prevailed in the siege, gave their pleasant things, i. e. their jewels, for meat* to relieve the soul, when departing, Lam. i. 11. But the figure before us alludes not to bodily fainting; this extravagant youth indeed began to be in want, and had he continued as he was, must soon have been starved; but he does not appear to have lost himself in respect of his animal spirit; nor is he presented as one insane, or in a state of natural madness, as was insinuated of our Saviour, and as Festus apprehended of Paul; no; he is not beside himself, or deprived of his reasoning powers for a season, like Nebuchadnezzar, who, when he came to himself,

* להשיב נפש To make the soul *return*, or as in verse 16. סשיב נפשי to *bring back* my soul, alluding to the case of expiring person, like Rachel, of whom it is said, Gen. xxxv. 18.—“ as her soul was departing, for she died.”

thus declares, "mine understanding and reason returned unto me," Dan. iv. 34, 36 *. But there is nothing said of this young man that impeaches his natural understanding; in his circumstances it was highly reasonable to submit to the lowest and most disagreeable service for bread; and as for his attempt to satisfy himself with the husks, what more common in case of fore famine than to have recourse to the most unlikely or unsuitable things, to answer the cravings of nature? We should not deem it irrational in a man in danger of perishing with hunger, were he to feed upon † acorns or chestnuts, bean-shells, or any thing else in his power, for the preservation of life. The allusion is not to any natural impediment, therefore it must be taken in a moral or spiritual sense. The truth is, that the prodigal is infatuated under various prejudices and delusions, the natural consequence of his first departure

* Persons may also be lost in surprize, as Peter, Acts xii. when the angel brought him out of prison, he wist not whether it was real or visionary; and accordingly when the angel departed, it is said, verse 2. "he came to himself;" But neither is there any thing in the supposed circumstances of the youth in the parable that answers to this.

† The word is generally rendered *siliquis*, which signifies any husk or shell, and is likewise applied by some to the wild chestnut. Dodderige on the place; and it is well known that to this day among us, swine feed upon acorns.

from his father, and the sensual course he had taken : his guilty fears, hardness of heart, and vain imaginations prevent him, so that he could not discern his case, or see the folly of endeavouring to support himself in his present circumstances, and survive the danger he was in ; this alone suits the intention of the parable, which is to set forth the disordered state of the unregenerate sinner, which is moral ; we shall presently see that it arises from the pride and deceit of his carnal mind, hence false ideas and evil inclinations delude him, “ for darkness has blinded his eyes.” Thus this miserable creature was deceived, for a season, till, on a sudden, the cloud breaks off, the vapours vanish, and he becomes sensible of his misery, and soon apprehends the only way of escape. Which leads,

To the condition he finds himself in, upon his eyes being opened, which is truly deplorable ! *I, says he, perish with hunger.*” He began to be in want before, yet thought he could live, but now he sees that utter ruin must be the consequence of abiding in his present situation ; his life was in danger ; his substance had some time been wasted and gone, but now the terrors of death are upon him, he despairs of subsisting any longer in the place where he was ; and apprehensive of approaching inevitable destruction, unless soon relieved, he makes this sensible and striking remark.

mark. He says, not simply, *I die*, but *I perish*; which implies an untimely and excruciating death; as when the righteous are slain by the sword of the persecutor. Isa. lvii. 1. But the *manner* in which this unhappy youth's end is expected, is extremely aggravating indeed: *I perish*, says he, WITH HUNGER. "They that be slain with the sword, are better than they that be slain with hunger, for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field." Lam. iv. 9. A man had better be stabbed, than starved to death; the one is sharp and soon over, but the other lingering and miserable! it is as it were dying by inches: This was the death which the Israelites charge Moses and Aaron with bringing upon them, in that bitter complaint. Exod. xvi. 3. Say they, "Ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill the whole assembly with hunger." Famine is one of the sorest judgments of the Almighty, it was therefore an awful period when the † fourth seal was opened, Rev. vi. 8. "The enemy

† It seems the general opinion of historians that this seal was opened in the third century, under the Roman emperors Maximinus and Dioclesian, with several short-lived tyrants between them, whose enmity and rage against the christians are notorious, and on whom the vengeance of heaven came down in a variety of judgments, among which were grievous famines, particularly in the times of Gallus and Volusianus; most cruel persecutors of the faithful.

had power to send a famine upon the earth, and to kill with *hunger* and with *death*." Death, or the pestilence is often the consequence of scarcity, and it is death with a witness, to perish with hunger, in which the miserable subject lingers out of life, and is gradually consumed from his own preternatural heat; the terror and torture of which, is beyond all expression; witness in the siege of Jerusalem, of which we have this tremendous description, Lam. iv. 8. " Their visage is blacker than a coal: they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones: it is withered, it is become like a stick." Such are the fearful consequences of pining in a famine. This tedious and miserable death now threatened the prodigal:—A shadow of that denounced on transgressors, as the wages of sin, the inconceivable torment of which abideth for ever. Mark ix. 46. " Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched !"—Thus dangerous and alarming the case of this man, who had ruined himself by extravagance and vice! yet he does not despair; one thing is possible, there is still a peradventure of life, which opens to his view, in this valley of Achor.

IN this wretched plight it occurs to his mind, "*that in his father's house there was bread enough, and to spare.*" This thought revived him: " It was like good news from a far country, and as cold waters to his

thirsty soul." Prov. xxv. 25. There was plenty in his native country, and at home, from whence he had foolishly wandered, there was more than sufficient; every hired servant had *bread enough and to spare*.—Welcome thought to the breast of a man who was ready to perish! Without it he had certainly fainted, but in a distant prospect of relief from this quarter, he takes encouragement: it is true he had no plea of merit, or pretence of right to his father's notice; no, he had alienated himself from the family, and had nothing to claim; nevertheless, he could not but hope, bad as he was, that he might, on a suitable application, be admitted to fare with the servants, the possibility of which was a leading step to his return. In like manner; a, who knoweth but God will have mercy upon me? has prevented the despair of many a sinner, and brought him to the throne of grace, where none ever perished. But further,

His eyes being opened, this miserable self-destroyed mortal reasons with himself on the case, for, as already observed, no man was with him; on reflection, he says, *How many hired servants of my father have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish for hunger!* q. d. "Fool that I am to sit thus in the midst of famine, tending swine, in the open fields, and labouring in vain to satisfy my self with these empty husks:

husks : I feel the painful cravings of nature ; my flesh crieth out, and a cruel death is hastening upon me, for want of necessary food, when, behold, in my father's mansion, there is ample provision, yea, a rich abundance ; not a servant of his but has more than *enough* ; and, shall I remain here, and perish with hunger, or die in despair ? God forbid !". Hence

HE resolves : *I will arise and go to my father.* Seasonable and happy resolution : This only could save him, and this is his free and firm determination : Not a moment's debate arose in his mind whether or not he should return to his father for bread ; he is instantly fixed on this measure, with all expedition ; and indeed a man almost starved, in the midst of a famine, who had nothing at all, nor a friend to relieve him, and at such a distance from home, had no time to lose, it was needful to apply immediately : of this the prodigal was sensible, therefore he could not delay, and accordingly we find that he arose, without hesitation ; of which in its place.

BUT many objections might be started from his behaviour and circumstances to shake his resolution. " What ; go to thy father, thou rebel ! Thy father, whom thou hast despised and abused ! Hast thou not per-

perversely withdrawn from his protection and government, and requited him evil for good? With what face canst thou see thy father, whose substance thou hast wasted in so base and criminal a manner? Is not thy riot and lewdness a dishonour to his name, and abominable in his sight? Besides, thy shameful appearance! What; go to thy father, in these filthy garments; thus ragged, barefoot and dirty! Will he own thee for a son, after all this vile conduct, or, in this wretched condition, admit thee into his house?"—Thus reason and conscience might rise to discourage a man in these sad circumstances from returning to an offended parent for relief; but, lo, he is prepared to answer all this, or any thing else that might be laid to his charge; he is deeply convinced of his folly, and being persuaded of his father's goodness at least so far as to hope that he would have compassion enough to admit him to the allowance of a servant, he is determined to cast himself at his feet, with an open confession of all his sins, and unworthiness. Which leads to the crowning article in the account; viz.

THE *manner* in which he resolves to apply; and this is laid out in the following remarkable terms: *And will say unto him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee; and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants.*

wants. A becoming and noble resolution ; in which we shall find all that is essential to an emblem of saving repentance. Note, he hangs on his relation of a son, I will go to MY FATHER. To renounce this character would be feigned and ridiculous ; and were it possible, must have destroyed the foundation of his hope ; he had been rebellious and wicked, but still he was a son, and claims the interesting relation throughout the whole scene, yet, conscious of guilt, he wisely determines, upon coming to his father, to prevent his just accusations, by his own frank acknowledgment, the moment he entered his presence. *Father, I have sinned against heaven.*

DISOBEDIENCE to parents is a provoking sin against heaven ; it is, as it were, flying in the face of God, who is the father of all ; once, under the law, the rebellious child was to be stoned ; and, however long suffering, the Lord will surely repay this heinous transgression, therefore let him that is tempted beware, but if any one mourns his ingratitude and folly, in this respect, let him copy the example ; let him acknowledge his iniquity, assured of forgiveness, and being received, that he may be constrained to a dutiful behaviour for the future. But this by the way.

THE

THE manifest design is to exhibit an evangelical penitent, whose understanding being opened, is sensible of his baseness, yet, in the prospect of mercy, comes to the throne of grace, with a frank acknowledgment of all his transgressions, and of his utter and eternal unworthiness, to be numbered among the children of God. The awakened sinner, whatever his peculiar circumstances, is ready to sign the prodigal's confession; indeed all mankind are not alike profligate, and but few, comparatively, are so daring and vicious as to answer the picture before us; i. e. literally and properly to abandon their parents and family, to spend all their portion in riot and pleasure; nevertheless each one is guilty before the most High: Isa. liii. 6. "All we like sheep have gone astray, and turned every one to his own way." Man, by nature, since the fall, is a child of wrath, disobedient, unholy, unthankful, and has in some form, wasted his talents in the service of sin, so that the enlightened transgressor, though in a degree comparatively moral, sees himself vile, and is convinced of his perishing state, unless prevented by grace, the proclamation of which, in the gospel, engages him to return unto the Lord, in the manner described; of which more hereafter.

THESE particulars present us with many things essential to the state and conversion of the natural

H

man,

man, which will be the subject of another discourse. I conclude the present with one remark on the unregenerate sinner, which is this, namely, that he is * OUT OF HIS MIND; startle not, Reader, I mean that he is in a like state with regard to *spiritual* objects, as the insane person, in reference to those which are *natural*. The prodigal's *coming to himself*, is not a stroke of mere ornament in the parable, but essential to the design; which is to set forth that in-

* *Out of his mind*. It is acknowledged even by some, who attribute the different turn which a penitent takes, on conviction of his folly and danger, to his own will and power, that the unconverted transgressor is in no better state. Thus a modern writer, speaking of great sinners, 'As wise, says he, as they fancy themselves, and none are more so in their own opinion, than most of them, they are the greatest fools, all DISTRACTED AND MAD, before they are converted.' HOW, on the Prodigal, Ser. VI. p. 118. The truth is, that not only the more profligate, as this gentleman seems to apprehend, but all mankind in their present apostate state, are in some degree spiritually insane, inasmuch that no unregenerate man *will*, or *can* think soberly on his wretched state, or form an effectual resolution of turning to God, till quickened by the Spirit of grace, his mind must *be turned* before it will *turn*. Jer. xxxi. 19. It seems an essential idea of the insane that they are incurable of themselves, but, be that as it may, in respect of natural things, how a man disordered in a spiritual sense, being dead in trespasses and sins, as fallen man is, should change his own heart, is hard to conceive. He that has a just notion of human depravity, will admit the necessity of a *new heart*, by the operation of God, according to the promise, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, &c. antecedent to the transgressor being, even *mentally*, active towards a saving repentance.

ternal

ternal change which is needful to a vital and saving repentance ; for without a change in this man we are at a loss to account for his conduct. How came it to pass that he acted so differently *now*, from what he had *hitherto* done in the same circumstances ? Why did he not at *first*, when he began to be in want, determine to arise and go to his father ; or what should *now* move him to resolve on this expedient for life ? here is no external alteration in his state ; his situation is exactly the same as when he thought of nothing but to satiate his belly with the trash prepared for the swine. Here then is a mystery which ought to be unfolded ; and the cause is assigned in the sentence before us. *And when he came to himself*, This certainly implies that before, he was not *himself*. in some sense or other, and we have already seen that his mind was disordered ; to adopt a law phrase, he was *non compos mentis*, in a *spiritual* sense ; a deceived heart misled him, insomuch that he was incapable of apprehending his ruin or recovery, but now he is turned ; an inward alteration takes place, he opens his eyes on his misery and danger, and perceives the only means of escape, on which he determines immediately.

IN like manner, apostate man in his natural state, however he may excel in worldly wisdom and knowledge, is void of spiritual light. See Ephes. iv. 18.

“ Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” And again, 1 Cor. ii. 14. “ The natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” In this wretched state the haughtiness of his flesh, and carnal reasoning, perverts his judgment, in favour of its lusts ; hence, as hinted already, vain imaginations and false conceptions, confuse and misguide him, insomuch that his mind is in a manner turned upside down, as the prophet Isaiah describes it. Chap. v. 20. “ He puts darkness for light, and light for darkness, and says concerning evil it is good, and of good it is evil,” for it suits not his taste. The natural man conceits himself wise, but as Zophar declares, Job xi. 12. “ He is born like a wild asses colt.” This is spoken of man in general, and must refer to the moral state, of his mind and understanding: A mortifying stroke to all human pride ! The gradation is beautiful and strong : An ass, is stupid to a proverb, yet an ass may be tamed, and brought to some discipline or knowledge, but a wild ass, and especially a wild ass’s colt, is of all the creatures in the wilderness, the most perverse, untractable and scornful. Thus the carnal mind, through the subtlety of the flesh, and of the spirit that worketh

eth in the children of disobedience, is under a kind of infatuation, so that the notions a natural man forms of God, of himself, and of the things which belong to his future and eternal state, are vain and deceitful, and leave him exposed to everlasting destruction. Alas; "Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known, there is no fear of God before their eyes." Rom. iii. 16, 17, 18.

SOME may think that this charge runs too high, and be ready to question the fact, or, it may be, boldly deny it; but this is the testimony of God, and let him be true, but every man a liar. Besides, this is evident to every unprejudiced person. Let it be seriously and impartially considered: Do not the unregenerate act a most irrational part, in respect of their souls and eternity, when, under the sound of the gospel, they indulge to sin in a neglect of salvation? What more stupid than the course of this world? Is it not folly, and even madness itself, to forsake the Almighty, and be voluntary slaves to corruption? Can the lunatic act a more frantic and dangerous part than the man who is sporting in his lusts, or seeking to satiate his originally heaven born, immortal soul with sensual enjoyments; objects, far more unsuitable to an intelligent being, than the husks with which the prodigal would satisfy his bodily hunger?

hunger? would a man in his senses devote all his powers in pursuit of those things? Things not only insufficient, but also hurtful, yea, and no less than mortal! Rom. vi. 21. But, is not this the conduct of natural men? Do they not, in one form or other, yield their members instruments of unrighteousness, and spend their all in the service of sin, which, when finished, is death? James i. 15. And again, if we view him convinced of his guilt, in the popular way of relief; how amazingly senseless his presumption of pardon, on the absolute mercy of the all-perfect Jehovah, whose spotless justice, and infinite holiness render it impossible for him to acquit, as he himself hath declared, Exod. xxxiv. 7. Nahum i. 3? Is it not most egregious folly to look for acceptance with God, in a way injurious to the honour of his law, or wherein his righteousness cannot be displayed, and this in a neglect, or it may be a contempt of the compleat atonement of Jesus, by which both are magnified in the remission of sins? Yet, alas, who is a stranger to this prevailing error in them who believe not the gospel: Thus experience confirms what the scriptures declare, that "madness is in the hearts of the sons of men." Eccles. ix. 3. Deceive not thyself, my dear Reader; the impenitent, who live in sin, or who think to cover their guilt with any thing short of the blood of Christ, will turn out as an horse or a mule, with-

out understanding, if we may credit the Psalmist, who had experienced the folly, to his sorrow and shame, Psalm xxxii. 9. all who neglect God's salvation will be dealt with as fools, when the faithful, appearing truly wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament for ever. This humbling truth, however disagreeable, will approve itself to the conscience of every unbiaſſed attentive person; nor is it in the least inconsistent with a due esteem of the distinguishing moral abilities of any. And here it seems proper to observe, that no man is nearer to a saving knowledge of the truth on account of superior talents. There is an essential difference between natural and spiritual wisdom; the greatest capacity is no less impotent to a discernment of the things of the Spirit than the least; parts, and learning, however subservient to the usefulness of them that are called, are no help towards the conversion of a sinner, but rather against him, for the flesh avails itself of the best things of its subject, yea, and what is still more, they who are conformed to the image of Christ will not be offended, but rather rejoice, that the gift of God is bestowed on the weak, while the glorious gospel is veiled from the eyes of many, who are amiably wise in this world. "I thank thee, O Father, says Jesus, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

Luke

Luke x. 21. So then, it is by a divine operation that the heart is opened to a saving knowledge of the truth, and the happy subjects of this special grace are taken chiefly from those who have no pretence of excelling their neighbours. Proud man may be disgusted; but the truth is, that the natural person is wrong principled, and under a deception with regard to spiritual objects; he is in this awful and dangerous sense beside himself; nor doth the veriest idiot on earth behave in a manner more stupid and irrational, respecting temporal and worldly concerns, than the finner doth in fulfilling his lusts, or in seeking relief to his wounded conscience, from any thing short of the grace which is in Christ Jesus.

WHAT objects then, of christian compassion are the multitude about us, in a state of ignorance and unbelief! When we see a fellow-creature deprived of his reason, humanity teaches us to commiserate his case, and we are ready to do any thing in our power towards the recovery of his senses, though, alas, such are often incurable! And have we no bowels for those who are spiritually insane; for those who, blinded and misled by the god of this world, are deceiving themselves to their ruin? Can we, who, ourselves were some time darkness, if now light in the Lord, behold others deluded, ignorant of sin, righteouf-

righteousness, judgment to come, and the only way of salvation, and not be deeply affected! Their case is truly deplorable! Then, beloved, seest thou a relation or neighbour in a course of iniquity, or under the awakenings of conscience, attempting to quiet himself short of that repentance which is connected with pardon, through faith in the great and only propitiation for sin; O pity his case! pray earnestly for him, that his eyes, being opened, he may come to himself, and be converted, and saved!



S E R M O N I V.

Luke xv.—17, 18, 19 verses inclusive.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger!—I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

THE scene now before us represents an awakened transgressor, in prospect of mercy, on the point of returning to the LORD. When the prodigal came to himself he resolved to go to his father, and acknowledge his guilt and unworthiness, as the only way of escape from a miserable death; antecedent to this he was out of his mind. Thus, we

have seen, the natural man, deluded by Satan, and the subtlety of his flesh, is no less incapable of discerning the things of the Spirit, than a person insane is to judge of his temporal concerns, nor are the wise and learned of this world, by all their boasted superior abilities, one jot nearer to spiritual understanding, than the foolish or illiterate part of mankind. With this mortifying, but true observation, we finished the last discourse; our present will turn on some other points of experimental religion, equally certain, the knowledge of which is of no less importance. And,

1. SINCE this is the apostate state of man, it is evident that his heart must be changed in order to * his turn unto God. The mind of this youth was restored before he discerned his perishing condition; till then he had no motive in him to go back to his father: thus the sinner must be translated from darkness to light, before he can forsake his ways and his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord. Now this

* Nothing can be more evident than a turn in the mind of this profligate youth; without this, in the state he is represented, he could never have reasoned and resolved as he did; in like manner, being born of the Spirit, a change takes place in the subject, not of judgment or opinion only, but of the whole heart, will and affections, as well as of the understanding, which indeed is essential to, if not the very essence of repentance unto life.

change is internal, instantaneous, and solely by the power of God, in which the subject is entirely passive: The will and power of the natural man can have no place in his regeneration, for being dead in sin, he is utterly destitute of any principle of operation towards his revival, which exactly answers to the picture in view. The visible circumstances of the prodigal were precisely the same, before, as after, he came to himself; so that nothing external is supposed to give him this turn; the alteration is therefore in his mind, hence he reasons, and resolves in the manner he did, and flees from the destruction he now saw hastening upon him, and the like change is needful to the transgressor's conversion. Again,

THIS forlorn creature was *instantly* changed, we have not the least intimation of any previous act, or thought which conduced to his unexpected resolution and conduct; and, indeed, what less than the finger of the Almighty can with reason be conceived to have produced such a turn in so abandoned a youth? That man must have little inclination to glorify God, who can refuse to ascribe to his power and grace, the repentance of one accustomed to the like dissipation and wickedness. But could it be otherwise in a case of natural disorder? suppose that, with respect to present things, a lost mind might possibly recover itself, we are to remember that natural

tural images of spiritual objects are inadequate to their original, and that in a just interpretation of parables it is needful to distinguish the disparity. The sinner's insanity is properly speaking unnatural and spiritual; it results from a depraved heart, and is rooted in the concupiscence of his flesh, which renders him totally, and for ever impotent; yea, utterly averse to a change; it is therefore morally impossible that he should regenerate himself; his conversion, or rather the change in him, which is previously necessary, must be from another, and from whom can it be, but from the omniscient Jehovah, in whose hand are all hearts, to direct them as rivers, whithersoever he pleaseth?

THE inability of the natural man to turn his own mind, is evident from Ephraim's experience, who, under a sense of backslidings, sought for repentance, and convinced of his weakness, cries out, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." Jer. xxxi. 18. If the arm of the LORD must be exerted to restore an awakened backslider, can it be imagined that the unregenerate sinner will repent of himself? No, surely; "a deceived heart hath turned him aside; yea, he *cannot* say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" Isa. xlv. 20. The deluded sinner has no just idea of his case; his carnal mind is filled with vain imaginations, excited by the god of this world

world that operates in them who are under his power, to the blinding of their eyes, insomuch that they cannot discern the things of the Spirit; the nature of sin, the demands of a broken law on its transgressor, the righteousness of God, or his own utter incapacity towards a ransom for the deliverance of his soul, are things far above him; hence the glory of divine grace in the gospel lies concealed from his understanding, and the preaching of the cross is foolishness unto him, neither *can* he receive it. Thus the natural man is far from conversion; he may, indeed, have strong convictions of sin, the terrors of the almighty may be upon him; he may also, under a fearful expectation, cry aloud for mercy, or by a reformation of manners, forms of devotion, or acts of charity, for in this case a man would give the whole world to be delivered from the wrath coming on him, I say his awakened guilty conscience may put him on every method to appease his offended and angry Judge! but even in these circumstances he has no power or disposition for evangelical repentance, which is represented in the conduct of the prodigal; nothing can be further from his thoughts, than to say *I will arise and go to my father*. It is against all his conceptions and inclinations to come to the God of all grace, reconciled in his Son Jesus Christ, and in a dependence on his word, present himself as he is, at his feet, with self abasement, and confess all
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his sin, and eternal unworthiness, that he may obtain remission, and life everlasting. This is the way prescribed in the gospel, and this is set forth in the parable before us, against which a popular clamour is raised in every age, nor should we be amazed, for the state of the natural mind being such as we have seen, "except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God;" and accordingly provision is made in the covenant of grace, for the call of the elect: "Thus saith the Lord, Ezek. xxxvi. 26. a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." The accomplishment of this free grace promise, in a vessel of mercy, is absolutely *necessary*, and blessed be God, no less *sufficient* to restore him to his right mind, and to enable him to return unto the Lord, who will have mercy upon him.

2. BY this draught it appears that the conversion of a sinner, however supernatural, is perfectly rational and consistent with the freedom of his will: Indeed, mere moral suasion is insufficient to open his eyes; a divine change and influence are needful to his repentance unto life, nevertheless, thus enlightened and assisted, his repentance is cordial and free; it is his own voluntary act, and this choice of his heart is on principles to be justified by reason itself; nor

doth the gracious hand of the Almighty in his conversion in the least impede, but rather enlarge his mental powers. Psalm cxix. 32. being turned, the sinner turneth himself as a reasonable creature. So then, the free agency of man and the power of God doth consist in this great affair, agreeable to that ancient grand prophecy, Psalm cx. 3. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." The flight of a sensible sinner to Christ for pardon and life, is indeed the effect of supernatural grace, and a mystery the world cannot receive, but not in any degree absurd, or enthusiastical. Ask the penitent, how, or on what motives he acted, when he first applied to the Lord for mercy? he will tell you, that, convinced of his total and everlasting ruin, under a righteous sentence of wrath for iniquity, and persuaded of the superabounding grace which is in Christ Jesus, he laid hold of this hope, and presented himself, with unreserved confession of his vileness and guilt, in a reliance on the promise of God, who cannot deceive or be deceived: And, can the haughty deist, or presumptuous libertine, shew a like reason for his licentiousness, pride and unbelief? In a word, however above the conceptions of a carnal mind, or contrary to the wisdom of this world, there is nothing in the sublimest experience, or conduct of the regenerate, in conversion, or in a life of faith, but what is sober and becoming, and will bear the

severest examination. Experimental religion may be foolishness with the natural man, who receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, but to him who can discern them, it is, the knowledge of the divine will, in all wisdom, and spiritual understanding, conducing to every good word and work. Colos. i. 9, 10. Again,

3. THIS similitude shews that one motive to the sinner's repentance is a deep conviction of the misery and ruin that awaits him. *I perish with hunger*, stands immediately connected with that seasonable and noble resolution, *I will arise and go to my father*. Indeed, as we may presently see, this alone is not sufficient, but it was the prodigal's sight of his perishing condition that induced him to resolve on a speedy return; in like manner a just and true sense of impending destruction, puts the sinner on returning to the Lord. A certain expectation of wrath is needful to determine the guilty transgressor on forsaking his way, and hastening him to the footstool of mercy; for, what motive can there be in a man to flee from that of which he is not afraid? This idea of the penitent corresponds with Isa. xxxii. 2. in which the Messiah is represented, "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest." So then, the vengeance of a sin-hating God, set forth in the curse of the law,
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has its place in the repentance of a sinner; and accordingly the faithful are described as having fled to Jesus for refuge. Heb. vi. 18. which agrees with that famous passage in Isaiah, xxvii. 13. "It shall come to pass in that day, i. e. in the gospel day, when Israel shall fill the whole world with fruit, verse 6, the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come that were ready to PERISH:" with many like scriptures in the Old and New Testament. Nevertheless, it may be useful to observe, that fears of wrath are not alike high, among real penitents. Some have felt so little of this legal terror, compared with some others, that, notwithstanding they believe in Jesus, who has redeemed us from the curse of the law, and trust in him as the only and all-sufficient Saviour, they question their change: thus the enemy distresses them against repeated assurance, that "he that believeth shall not be confounded;" on the other hand, there are christians in painful doubt of their state, because these terrors of the law induced them to seek after life: conscious that the fears of hell were much concerned in the first application for mercy; this, say they, is no other than legal, and what a natural man may experience, therefore fear that they are strangers to genuine conversion, not considering the example before us, and that the like terrors may be found with the unregenerate, under the accusations of natural conscience,

which at first seized the man to whom God hath granted repentance unto life : Nature and grace are essentially different, yet there is some analogy between them : who need be told that a variety of bodily diseases, radically different, are sometimes attended with the like general symptoms ? Hence the unskilful, or careless physician may mistake to the prejudice, or it may be to the ruin of his patient ; in like manner both the natural and the spiritual man are liable to great distress, through an apprehension of approaching judgment, but with this manifest difference, that, whereas the *former* is either abandoned to despair, or not being fully convinced of his utter ruin, like the youth in the parable, before his recovery, will be seeking relief short of that repentance required in the gospel ; the *latter*, having no hope in himself, and perceiving the way of life, resolves on a return, with self-abasement, and will be satisfied with nothing less than the salvation of God : And that a true penitent is originally moved from a sight of his misery and destruction appears from the proclamations of grace, in which the objects addressed are considered as under this awful expectation ; for instance, John iii. 14. 16. “ as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up,—that whosoever believeth in him should not PERISH, but have everlasting life.” Now, as no Israelite would look to
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the brazen serpent, until he was stung, and felt himself mortally wounded, neither will any sinner look unto Christ for life, who is not self-condemned, and ready to perish. But then,

4. WE are to note, that nothing short of a full persuasion that there is mercy, and a plenteous redemption for sinners, will engage a transgressor to return unto the Lord. It was in confidence of there being more than sufficient in his father's house, that inspired this perishing youth with a resolution to humble himself in order to obtain it. Without a prospect of reconciliation, or at least, a possibility of being accepted and pardoned, the deepest conviction of guilt and wrath would rather drive the miserable subject to despair: A condemned criminal can never endure the sight of his judge, but will, if possible, flee him, whose office it is to deliver him up to the executioner of justice; so then, an apprehension of impending ruin is not sufficient of itself to induce the sinner to repentance, it is needful that he is morally assured, that, vile and unworthy as he is, and near to destruction, there is at least a probability, if not a certainty of his escape, on his coming to God by his Son. Now this hope is set before him in the word; the general report of the Gospel, namely, that, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," warrants any man, sensible

sible of his guilt, to look unto him and be saved; for there being no exception in the gracious report, he may well hope for mercy, nor is this hope interdicted by the election of God, or the limitation of Christ's propitiatory death to a people given him by the Father, according to the scripture; the chosen he hath redeemed are before him, but his secret and revealed will must needs coincide, and his decrees correspond with the promise of his mouth, so that whoever finds himself ready to perish, has a presumptive evidence of being of that happy number, whom "God hath from the beginning chosen to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth," and therefore may be encouraged to appropriate the blessings of grace.

As the prodigal was animated from the consideration of there being ample provision at home, in like manner the enlightened sinner beholds an all-sufficient fulness in the Mediator; many are the saints on earth and in heaven that are sustained and fatiated in him; many in his father's house are fed to the full, and yet there is room; *there is enough and to spare*; Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who come unto God by him; in his name, repentance and remission of sins is preached to every creature, in all nations, to the end of the world. The voice of Christ in the gospel is this, "My flesh is meat in-

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deed,

deed, and my blood is drink indeed." And again he saith, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." John vi. 35, 55. Blessed is the man who heareth this counsel of God, but woe to the disobedient unbeliever, who despairs. And further,

IN this example we see that an awakened sinner is resolved without delay to apply to the Father of mercies, for salvation and life. This man is no sooner convinced of his danger, and persuaded that relief was to be obtained, but he immediately resolves, and accordingly arose, and went to his father; here is no preparation, as will hereafter appear; he stays not for meat or for dress; indeed in his circumstances it were in vain to attempt an alteration for the better, nor would this in the least have promoted his acceptance, he therefore wisely determines *now*, to go to his injured parent in the condition he was, and to lay himself at his feet. Thus it is with the genuine penitent; that sense of sin which admits of any parlying is defective, for, whoever can loiter or postpone, is not well apprized of his impotence and danger, or of the ways of the LORD with transgressors, who is ready to forgive; but he that is taught of God, hath no time to lose, he sees himself instantly exposed to everlasting destruction, if grace prevent not, and, in prospect of salvation, hastens

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to the throne of mercy, with unfeigned contrition, that he may be thoroughly washed from his iniquity; which leads,

6. To note that a frank confession and deep self-abasement are essential * concomitants of evangelical repentance. We have a striking instance of this in the prodigal's address, *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.* In like manner David, Psalm xxxii.

5. "I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid; I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD." So comes the penitent soul; pleading guilty, he comes with a sincere acknowledgment of all his sin and rebellion, to the utmost of his power; being deeply convinced of his baseness, and the evil of his crimes, he lays himself open at the throne of grace, saying, behold, I am vile, and would not for all the world cover or extenuate his sin. Thus the shameful, but wounded

* *Concomitants of evangelical repentance.* Repentance, strictly speaking, is a change of mind; the subject's turning to God, with unserved confession, and, yielding himself a servant of righteousness unto holiness, in a new course of life, are rather the effects of this grace, than repentance itself, which, like faith, is seated in the heart; but these godly fruits are not wanting in a real penitent.

backslider. Psalm li. 4, 5. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight," O how frank, how earnest, how pointed is his confession! He comes accusing himself, and the greatness of his sin is the burthen of his soul, while he is instructed by the spirit of the gospel to turn this very burthen into an argument for mercy, agreeable to that astonishing petition, Psalm xxv. 11. "For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity, FOR IT IS GREAT!" Thus the sinner comes unto the Father of grace, in expectation of pardon and life, but, at the same time, is sensible, and acknowledges, that he can never merit the character of a son; as the Syrians, 1 Kings xx. 32. came to the king of Israel in sackcloth on their loins, and ropes on their heads, under a persuasion of his mercy; the penitent puts his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope; he owns himself deserving the wrath he flees, and vindicates the justice of the sentence he is under, a deliverance from which he expects, as the fruit of unmerited love, through the death of his Saviour. In one word, his heart is full of his own guilt and unworthiness, and the sovereign mercy of God in his Son; and the man who is an entire stranger to this experience, does not appear to be spiritually sensible, but is either wholly unconcerned, or has flattering hopes of salvation.

ONCE again, this description shews that a sincere penitent is content in any station or circumstances in the house of the LORD; all his desire is BREAD FOR HIS SOUL; he has no mercenary views, or selfish motive to a profession, as the hypocrite has, but comes deeply sensible of his unworthiness, to be admitted a partaker in the grace he applies for, so that, at present, nothing is farther from his thoughts than to be exalted in the church. Indeed all his expectation and hope is grounded in that covenant, in which Jehovah assumes the character of a FATHER; and nothing will satisfy him short of being a child; it is contrary to the idea of an evangelical spirit, and the representation before us, to suppose that the returning sinner would appropriate any thing less than the character of a son, with which the promise is connected; the prodigal claims his relation again and again, in the terms of his address, saying, *Father, I have sinned*; nor doth he desire to be reduced to the character of a slave, which would have been servile and base, and unworthy the relation he sustained, his language is this, *Make me AS one of thy hired servants*; still considering himself a son, though one that had forfeited the privilege of that near and noble relation; nevertheless, his confession and request betokens humility and a readiness to submit to the meanest place under the roof of his father.

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In like manner, at first conversion, the subject is far from pride and ambition; he aspires to no exalted station, nor doth he conceit himself entitled to any situation above the least of all saints. Oh that the same humble spirit prevailed universally among the children of God to the end of their days! But, alas, what shameful, yea, and in some periods, what miserable divisions in the church, through the pride and vain glory of some, who, Diotrophes like, would have the pre-eminence, or like the sons of Zebedee, would be great, that they might exercise authority over their brethren: This proneness to self-exaltation is carnal, and opposite to the genuine spirit of a self condemned penitent; and the man who disturbs the peace of the church by his ambition, envy or intrusion, is spiritually proud, and knows nothing, or if the root of the matter is in him, he has forgot the love of his espousals, and the manner in which he first joined the Lord. ‘*Then, O Christian when thou first saw, or claimed the blessings of grace, and the privileges of the gospel, thou wast clothed with humility; as a new born babe at the breast, thy desires went after the sincere milk of the word; thou didst then blush, and think thyself utterly unworthy of being numbered with the people, and wert ready to sit at the threshold, esteeming it an honour to be a door-keeper in the house of thy God; art thou now ambitious of the highest post in the sanctuary, or tempted to*

break the peace of Jerusalem, because thou art not advanced to this or the other eminent station? consider thy folly; call to mind how thou hast received and heard, and repent; remember it becomes thee rather to prefer thy brethren in love, and that whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased.'

THESE particulars, concerning the repentance of a sinner are exemplified in the prodigal's resolution, when he came to himself, to return to his father, on a view of there being a sufficiency at home to supply all his wants, and at least a probability of his obtaining it: It exhibits the unregenerate man in a state of spiritual insanity, insomuch that his heart must be changed before he can repent; that nothing is more rational or free than the enlightened sinner's coming to God by Christ, in whom there is life: the first motive of which is the certain and miserable destruction that awaits him; it further appears from this figure that a full persuasion of there being mercy with God is needful to engage the guilty to return; in prospect of which, a perishing sinner delays not to humble himself, with frank confession of all his transgressions, and being free from vain self-conceit or carnal ambition, his whole desire is wrapped up in the favour of God, and a portion with his children, to be numbered, with whom he thinks himself totally undeserving, for ever.

PERMIT

PERMIT me then, dear* Reader, again to move thy bowels in behalf of those that are ignorant and out of the way. Thou seest a neighbour, relation or acquaintance, devoted to his lusts, or under conviction of sin, seeking after life, short of an interest in Christ, how piteous his case! Consider, that without a change it is impossible he should turn from the ways of destruction; O then wrestle for him with the God of all grace, that his understanding may be opened, and that, being found in his mind, he may be wise unto salvation. This is friendship indeed, and true christian charity!

WHAT, then, are the doctrines suited to the conversion of a sinner? Doubtless those, and those only that discover the guilt, corruption, and weakness, of apostate man, and the free grace of God in his Son. To flatter mankind with notions of their natural goodness, wisdom and power, is to confirm them in their native ignorance, pride and deceit; it is to hide from them the sight of their wretchedness, without which they will never repent, and submit to the righteousness of God; and, can any thing be more injudicious and cruel? Every idea of human merit and ability, for what concerns the salvation of a sinner, is not only the reverse of divine revelation, but also a contradiction to the state in which

* See Sermon III. p. 39.

the awakened transgressor finds himself, and tends to despair, for the man that is ready to perish can attain no relief but from the satisfaction and grace of the Lord Jesus, who is set forth a propitiation, through faith in his blood. The penitent has no merit in himself, therefore nothing short of a free pardon, will reach his case, or save him from deserved destruction; he therefore will not, neither can he repent on any other principles, than those contained in the gospel.

AND further, Is repentance unto life so highly rational and becoming? Then let us not be moved by the malicious clamor of the ignorant and ungodly, who reproach the truth of Christ, and represent the experience and practice of his disciples as absurd, or downright enthusiasm. It is no wonder that the doctrine of a crucified Jesus, and the power of his grace, should seem strange to men, who are blinded by the god of this world, and conceit themselves something; but the believer may know, on reflection, that he never thought to any purpose about divine things, till the LORD opened his heart; and although his repentance and faith proceeds on supernatural principles, and is maintained and carried on by the power of the Spirit, his reason acquiesces in the wisdom of God; his conscience bears witness to the truth and sobriety of his religion, nor was he
ever

ever so fully in possession of himself, or more compleat in the exercise of his reasoning powers, than when he fled for refuge to the hope set before him ; his obedience of faith, though far above the natural man, and a mystery to the world, is perfectly reasonable, and will bear any scrutiny.

COME then, my friend, what evidence hast thou of this saving change ? Art thou indeed come to thyself ? Have thine eyes been opened ? Thou art then sensible of a great alteration ; it is not with thee as heretofore ; at least thou canst say, with the man in the gospel, “ One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, I now see.” All things are new to the new creature, the Deity, sin, satan, the world, mankind, the bible, and his own heart, —these all appear in a *different*, yea, in a *contrary* light, to that in which, he once viewed them. In consequence of this he has been humbled under a sense of his native ignorance and vileness, and enabled to present himself guilty to the Father of mercies, pleading the merit of his Son, and trusting in the promise of life. And is this thy experience, my friend ? O the infinite obligation thou art under to the love of the Father, who chose thee in Christ, whose Spirit has formed thee, a willing-hearted penitent, at the throne of grace, where thou hast obtained mercy to believe ; thy hope shall not make thee ashamed ;

keep daily in view thine utter unworthiness, and the rich grace displayed in thy redemption, and pardon, through the blood of Christ may renewed acts of repentance and faith enliven thee, and let each divine person have the glory of thy salvation, in a worthy deportment, and thy countenance shew that thou art truly nourished up in the words of faith and sound doctrine. In a word, dear Reader, remember that it is not thine own resolution or repentance, which indeed are vital acts of faith, subservient to salvation ; yet, not these ; I say ; but the *bread of life*, in thy Father's house that must sustain thee for ever ; live then upon a crucified Jesus, even upon the flesh and blood of thy Saviour, who gave himself for the life of the world. “ I am, says he, that bread of life which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die.” Lord, evermore enable us to eat of this bread, that we may live to praise, and enjoy thee, with all saints, through the countless ages of eternity !

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P R O D I G A L,

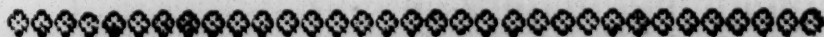
ON HIS RETURN,

Meets with a most tender RECEPTION,
AND IS INVESTED WITH EVERY PRIVILEGE OF
A S O N.

A N
ILLUSTRATION of the Love of GOD, manifested
in the PARDON of SIN;

And other BLESSINGS he graciously bestows on
penitent SINNERS.

P A R T III.



J. H. B. 1847

P R O D I G A L

OR

THE LOST SON

AND HIS RETURN

A

BY

THE REV. J. H. B.

OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

AND HIS RETURN

TO HIS FATHER'S HOUSE

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S E R M O N V.

Luke xv.—from the 20th to the 24th verse inclusive.

And he arose and came to his father.—But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: But the father said to his servants; Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.

A NEW scene now opens, in which we are presented with the prodigal's return to his father, and the gracious reception he met with, which is truly wonderful, and no less instructive. In at-

tending to this striking picture of repentance and love, it will be proper to shew who, or what is designed in each of the principal objects that appear, review and illustrate its several parts, and then point out the particulars held forth in the passage for our spiritual improvement.

OUR present discourse will turn upon the figures in the scene. And, who knows not this parable? The capital objects are easily interpreted by them who are conversant with the gospel of Christ; they fall under two general divisions, *persons* and *things*: the personal characters are the *father*, his *younger son* and the *servants of the household*, and the other figures of importance are *a robe*, *a ring*, *shoes*, and *a fatted calf*; which comprehend the favours bestowed on the penitent. With respect to the father and his son, now before us, we have already seen that it is in a manner universally agreed, that the one represents God the Father, and the other a sinner, whose conversion proves him a predestinated child, appointed to glory, for this grace is bestowed on them only to whom it is given in Christ, before the world began. 2 Tim. i. 9. By the servants, some understand holy angels; it is indeed declared, verse 10, that these blessed spirits rejoice at the repentance of a sinner; so that they might well be included among those who were merry at the feast, on this happy occasion,

caſion ; but the ſcene is not laid in *heaven* nor can any ſuch event take place in the world to come : “ *Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of ſalvation.” Repentance is hid from the grave, and he that dies in his ſins is ſealed up in guilt for judgment to come. The father’s houſe in the parable, is the houſe of our heavenly Father on *earth*, where penitent ſinners confeſs to his name ; now, although angels are ſent forth, under the Son of God, his inviſible miniſters, for the heirs of ſalvation. Heb. i. ult. They are not the conſtituted ſervants in the viſible church in this world : It is true, we read, Rev. xiv. 6. “ That John ſaw an angel fly in the midſt of heaven, having the everlaſting goſpel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth ;” but this was a prophetic viſion, and it is plainly a myſtical paſſage, referring to ſome period, whether paſt or yet to come, I ſhall now not enquire, when the goſpel ſhould run and be glorified through the whole world ; but it is the wiſdom of God, for the diſplay of his power, in the effects of his grace, to put this treaſure in earthen veſſels. 2 Cor. iv. 7. Theſe miniſtring ſpirits therefore cannot be intended. The ſervants in the parable are therefore more juſtly applied to the miniſters of the word, who are employed to diſplay the righteouſneſs of God, proclaim liberty to the captive, and to ſhew the privileges of them
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who believe. The expression, here rendered, * *bring forth*, signifies to utter or pronounce, and is well adapted to a gospel ministry, which consists much in publishing the good tidings of salvation, by the incarnate Son of God, whom the Father hath set forth a propitiation thro' faith in his blood, for the remission of sins. These servants of the Lord, in preaching the unfearchable riches of Christ, as it were, produce and unfold the righteousness of God, that robe of salvation, which covers the saints, as may hereafter appear.

BUT the servants are ordered not only to *bring forth*, but also to *put on* the best robe, and other precious things, brought forth from the treasury or wardrobe of their father; this at first view may seem strange, if not assuming, and difficult to reconcile; for instance, with respect to this robe, which we shall presently see, may be considered as an emblem of the justifying righteousness brought in by the Messiah. The imputation of this to the sinner is strictly and properly a divine act; in the œconomy of salvation, it is the Father, as judge of all, that justifies the sinner, according to the riches of his grace, which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life,

* Εξενέγκαι Efferte, A. Mont.

by his Son. Rom. v. 23. And the manifestation of this, to the penitent's conscience, is the office of the Spirit, who as it were, covers the naked soul, cast out to the loathing of itself, with the skirt of the Redeemer, Ezek. xvi. 8. And farther this grace is bestowed, or imputed from Christ, unto whom the sensible perishing sinner is directed for every spiritual blessing, Rev. iii. 18.—So then, it is the act, or work of Jehovah, to invest his chosen and called, who are saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, that being justified freely they may inherit the promise, Tit. iii. 5. and accordingly the church is represented as saying, with admiration and joy, Isa. lxi. 10. “*He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation*”—and again, “*He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness!*” Nevertheless, the propriety of this circumstance, or its consistency with the truth, will appear when we consider that it is not unusual, even without a parable, for the scripture to represent the messengers of the Lord, as *doing* what they are sent to *proclaim*. Thus the prophet Jer. i. 10. is said to be “set over nations and kingdoms, to root out and pull down, to destroy and build up,” events which the Lord brought about by other instruments, according to his word by his servant: much more may gospel ministers, who are not mere heralds, but instruments of the Holy Ghost, the glorious agent
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of the covenant, by whom the *called* believe, as the Lord giveth to every man, 1 Cor. iii. 5. So important is the idea of those whom a dispensation of the gospel is committed, they are such by whom it pleaseth God to save them that believe; their report is not a simple rehearsal, but a preaching, or a setting forth from the scriptures, the counsel of God, that by the manifestation of the truth to the consciences of men, they may be converted and saved; "The LORD hath anointed me, saith the prophet, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, &c." Isa. lxi. 1. It is their province to encourage a sensible sinner to lay hold of, and put on his righteousness by faith. These things come to pass under the agency of the Spirit: but, seeing the ministry of the word is ordained by infinite wisdom, in a subsergency to the divine operation, they are ascribed to them who sustain and execute the office; so that the servants in the parable, being ordered to put on the best robe, is no just objection to their being the representatives of the ministers of Christ: seeing even this may be attributed to them in a qualified sense, agreeable to the language of scripture.

LET us now pass from the *personal figures*, to those of the *things* which are exhibited, and applied to this penitent youth; and here we renounce every fanciful and vain imagination, taking the scripture

alone for our guides. The first thing presented is
 * *the best robe*: A robe, it is well known, is a long

* By the *best robe*, says the writer, referred to page 58, is meant the pardon of sin; which is the first blessing of a true repentance, and fitly stiled a robe, or white raiment, seeing all true penitents are deemed innocent by God: This pardon, that Gentleman, very justly, ascribes to the blood of the Lamb. No doubt remission of sin is a capital blessing of grace bestowed on the penitent, who is justified; but the privilege of gospel justification, is not merely forgiveness of sin, it also includes a title to life, grounded on the merit of the Saviour's obedience to the death of the cross, by which his people are made righteous. Rom. v. 19. The apostle, therefore, thus interprets, Psalm xxxii 1. "Blessed is the man whose SIN IS COVERED," "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord IMPUTETH RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT WORKS." Rom. iv. 6. Indeed, it is said "we are justified by his blood," Chap. v. 9. for nothing short of Christ's death could have availed to our deliverance, but the believer is interested in his active obedience for justification, Rom. x. 4. "He is the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth." But this, and the like passages, which exhibit the righteousness of God; are passed by in the writings of some, who speak of pardon through the blood of Jesus; with what candour and justice I am not able to discern: be their motive what it may, the Reader is reminded, that two things are required to the justification of a sinner; namely, that he be discharged from his guilt, and that he is invested with a law righteousness, which he can never produce from himself. This is that righteousness which is of God, by faith, in which the christian is justified freely by grace; now this righteousness I apprehend is immediately intended by the *best robe* in the parable before us, which answers to the scripture account: and the believer thus purged and invested, in my opinion, is rather *acquitted and justified*, than *innocent*.

and beautiful garment, that covers and adorns the person who wears it, to which the righteousness of the saints is frequently compared ; our business is to enquire after the righteousness intended in the text, and justify the epithet ; or to shew in what respects this spiritual garment may be styled the *best* robe.

RIGHTEOUSNESS belonged to man in his original state, for God created him upright, and while he was innocent there could be no charge against him ; but, alas, he is fallen, and come short of this divine glory ; he is involved in guilt and pollution ! In this deplorable state the whole race of Adam must have sunk into endless perdition, had it not been the pleasure of God to appoint a seed, who are styled vessels of mercy afore prepared unto glory, and for whose recovery and salvation provision is made, as set forth in the gospel ; hence sinners are converted, and believe unto life everlasting ; to every subject of this divine grace, who loves God, being called according to his purpose, there belongs a righteousness both moral and legal, agreeable to his state in Christ Jesus ; these are inseparable to a life of faith, yet distinct in their nature and properties ; the one inherent and practical ; the other imputed and judicial, and they are both everlasting ; since the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever, for he will not forsake the work of his hands, Psalm

cxxxviii. ult. Every believer is possessed of a moral righteousness, being renewed in the spirit of his mind, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Ephes. iv. 23, 24. And this real sanctification of heart will ever be attended with an upright and pure conversation; for, “the fruit of the Spirit is in all righteousness, goodness, and truth.”

Now, This moral righteousness of the saint, internal and external, is sometimes compared to a robe: Thus holy Job, xxix. 14. without any pharisaical boasting, in respect of his integrity or genuine piety, which was impeached, declares, “I have put on righteousness, and it clothed me, my judgment was a robe and a diadem.” But the robe brought forth in the parable, is evidently different from the ring and the shoes, which we shall presently see, may be applied to the gift and grace of the Spirit; besides, according to the above, and other like passages, this moral righteousness is put on by the subject himself; indeed the principle of holiness is implanted in regeneration, and solely of the operation of the Holy Ghost; but the sanctified subject is active, through grace, in forming his spirit and conduct agreeable to the will of God; whereas you see the robe here presented is put on by another; and truly the shameful condition of the prodigal, by which is held forth the sinner’s nakedness, required change of raiment. Moreover, strictly speaking, by a robe,

we understand an external garment, with which, as hinted before, a person is covered and adorned ; now, in the explanation of parables, it seems unjust, and tends to confusion to depart from the genuine idea of a metaphor, unless the nature of the story requires it. These things considered, we may soberly interpret this robe of an external law-righteousness, which, according to the gospel, can be no other than that righteousness which is through the faith of Christ, even that righteousness which is of God by faith, in which the apostle desired to be found, Phil. iii. 9. This robe was brought in by the Messiah, who finished transgression, and made an end of sin, when he was cut off for his people, Dan. ix. 24. Hence saith the scripture ; “ By the obedience of one many shall be made righteous,” Rom. v. 19. This is that righteousness without the law, which is imputed without works, and in which the *ungodly* are justified, Rom. iii. 21. Chap. iv. 5. 6. compared. This divine righteousness is said to be *unto* all, and *upon* all them that believe, for there is no difference. Rom. 3. 22. which perfectly agrees with the justifying righteousness of the Son of God, imputed to the believer, but suits not with a moral righteousness, which is inherent, and in the present state imperfect, so that there are degrees of true holiness, and consequently a difference among the saints themselves, but in respect
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of justification the faithful are alike compleat, covered from head to foot, as in the forementioned, Isa. lxi. 10. "I will be joyful in my God, for he hath COVERED me with the robe of righteousness."

Now this spiritual garment is styled *the best robe*, not that any creature righteousness, however comparatively good, can justify a sinner in the sight of God; a justifying righteousness must needs be commensurate to the law the subject is under. In a court of justice every man is justified or condemned; there is no medium; a justifying righteousness must be *perfect*, and *better* than *perfect* it cannot be, so that it admits of no comparison; hence it appears that the notion of being accepted with God, the judge of all, in a comparative righteousness, such as our imperfect, though sincere obedience, on which too many presume, in opposition to the righteousness imputed from Christ, is contrary to the nature and fitness of things, so much talked of by some; it will not bear the test of sound reason, being no less inconsistent with the principles of justice, than with the grace revealed in the gospel. This epithet is nevertheless to be justified, first, from the intrinsic excellency and infinite glory of this gospel righteousness; its transcendent beauty and merit are represented under the metaphors of gold, and white raiment, Rev. iii. 18. which denote its perfection, as spotless
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and durable, and agrees with Psalm xlv. 13. in which it is declared of the king's daughter, that "*her clothing is of wrought gold.*"

It may likewise be styled the *best* robe in comparison with all other moral righteousness whatever. The righteousness of Adam in a state of innocency, though perfect and glorious in its kind, was no better than that of a mere creature; it was the righteousness of a *man*; but this gospel robe is a *divine* righteousness, resulting from the obedience of the Son of God, who is the true God and eternal life, in whose obedience the law was not barely repaid, but even in some respects magnified, Isa. xlii. 21. And what is the inherent righteousness of the saints in this life, however upright and fruitful, or increased, on which account they may be styled perfect? What is the righteousness of any one believer, or the whole church united, compared with that spotless robe of salvation, wrought out by the Redeemer, in which his people appear comely in the sight of Jehovah, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? If we ascend up to heaven, glorious, beyond expression, is the righteousness of the holy angels, that stand before God, and likewise that of the spirits of the just, who shine in perfection at the throne of the Lamb; but their righteousness is not of themselves, and however illustrious,
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like those of their celestial companions, without spot or blemish, it hath no justifying quality in it, or if it had, could benefit no other than its subject ; but the righteousness of Christ, justifies those unto whom it is imputed, and is a meritorious cause of pardon, and a title to glory to millions, who were by nature children of wrath, even to all that believe on his name, in every age and place, to the end of the world. It is, then, the *best* robe, as it *answers the noblest purposes*, by which the righteousness of God is declared in the remission of sins, even to the justification of the ungodly, covering the believer, and also his personal righteousness, or holiness, which in this state, at best is imperfect ; for all his good works require cleansing, as appears from the purgations of the sanctuary, priesthood, and holy things of the congregation, under the law, Num. xviii. 1. Exod. xxviii. 38. compared. Moreover it may be styled the *best* robe, on account of its expence : The price was no less than the precious blood of the Son of God, by which we are redeemed from the curse of the law, otherwise it was impossible that the transgressor should be justified. It is also *best*, as it is most acceptable to Jehovah, in which he is well pleased. Isa. xlii. 21.

IN a word; this robe is so perfect and glorious, it may, with sobriety, reverence and truth, be asserted, that
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a better robe is not possible for a holy God to give; or put on, or for sinful man to receive and wear. Justly then is this robe of salvation called the *best* robe, not in comparison with any other justifying righteousness of a sinner, for, indeed, no other exists; but this epithet is grounded in the infinite worth and glory of the Redeemer's righteousness, and its transcendent excellency, in comparison with all the righteousness of the creature, angels of men, on earth or in heaven, its salutary nature, and noble effects, the expence of its purchase, and its certain and high acceptation with God, in behalf of the person, unto whom it is imputed. How glorious this robe of salvation; and, who is worthy to be invested therewith? Yet, O astonishing grace, it is put upon none but the ungodly: Not a soul shall stand at the tribunal of Christ, clothed in his righteousness, but will appear to have received this gift, under the character of a guilty, unrighteous, *hell deserving creature*.

THE next thing presented is a *ring*. And *put a ring on his hand*. The scripture shews that this jewel is applied in token of union and love; it is a kind of ornamental pledge of the favour of him that bestows it, and of certain privileges to which the subject is adopted. Thus Gen. xli. 42. Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph;

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in token of his being exalted to honour. In like manner Ahasuerus confirms the authority of Haman, Esther iii. 11, 12. The ring put on the hand of this penitent son, fitly represents the tokens of the Father's love to them that are called, through the agency of the Spirit, by and with whom they are sealed, according to the promise of the covenant, and entitled to claim the privilege of a son. Some apply it to the gift of the Spirit, which is an earnest of the inheritance; but whether it is taken for the Spirit itself, or the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, as others understand it; the emblem conveys an idea of the nearest, dearest, and most interesting union; even that resulting from matrimonial contract, to which the saints union with Christ is frequently compared; and accordingly, by the inhabitation of the Spirit, and a display of divine love in the subject, by his power and grace, the believer is confirmed in his predestination, to the adoption of a child, and his covenant relation; hence a way is opened for joy in God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, of which there is a shadow in the rejoicing of the prodigal and his family, on his being restored safe and sound. And with this stands connected,

SHOES *on his feet*: It is said with admiration concerning the church, Song, chap. vii. 1. "How beautiful

tiful are thy feet with shoes, O princess daughter !” And again, Ezek. xvi. 10. “The Lord saith to Jerusalem, I shod thee with badger’s skin.” These passages, I apprehend are in some connexion with the subject in hand : be that as it may, the comforting and sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost are united in them that are called. Now, natural feet being instruments of motion to the body, are sometimes metaphorically taken for the affections, which are the moving powers of the soul ; but at other times this figure hath a reference to practice, and then they signify the walk of the christian, as in Ephes. vi. 15. It is suggested by Grotius, Henry, and others, that this alludes to the use God makes of them that are called by his grace, to the conversion of others ; and no doubt, it is the desire of those who obtain mercy of the Lord, to teach transgressors their ways, that sinners may be converted unto him ; and there are few, if any believers, who are not in some measure useful this way, at least in a becoming walk, their holy conversation has a tendency to convince and engage the world to the faith of the gospel. However this is certain, that they who are clothed with the righteousness of Christ are endued with his Spirit, “their feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, so that the blessing of Asher is upon them, for their shoes are as iron and brass.” Deut. xxxiii. 25. Being justified by faith
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they have peace with God, through the blood of their Redeemer, and are purged from dead works to serve him. Thus fortified they are not easily defiled with the pollutions that are in the world through lusts, nor offended with the briars and thorns; those afflictions and temptations, by which many formal professors are turned aside, and drawn back to perdition, whereas the true christian continues stedfast in the ways of the Lord to the end; for he hath said, Ezek. xxxvi. 27. "I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes." And again, in Jeremiah, "they shall not depart from me." Also the putting shoes on the prodigal, points out the beggarly and destitute plight in which he returned to his father, without a shoe to his foot; and it likewise shews that his folly had reduced him to the condition of a slave or captive, see Isa. xx. 4. all which most fitly represents the state of the sinner, and the freedom and capacity he obtains, by grace, on his repentance, for walking as a child of God, among the heirs of salvation.

ONE object more demands our notice, viz. *The fatted calf*. This is not a mere circumstance, or shade in the picture, but essential to the design; it shews in what the parties reconciled, and their friends unite, and commune together, with mutual satisfaction and joy; without this, a view of the

end of God's grace in Christ Jesus, which is the scope of the parable, would be wanting, which is nothing short of restoring his people to a delightful and eternal fellowship with himself, and consequently the scene would be imperfect, which cannot be allowed.

THE figure is singular and striking: It is emphatically styled *THE fatted calf*: a calf is a creature frequently chosen and prepared with a view to some great entertainment, which are circumstances well adapted to the intention of our Lord. It is known that fatted calves were antiently used in feasting, and also in covenants and sacrifice, all which are included in the design before us. The scripture shews that it was customary for princely and generous persons to feed these creatures, and dress them, on extraordinary occasions, to entertain their beloved or noble guests. Thus Abraham treated the angels at the plains of Mamre, Gen. xviii. 7. And the woman of Endor, King Saul, 1 Sam. xxviii. 24. We likewise read Jer. xxxiv. 18. of a covenant made by the people, "when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof." See also Gen. xv. 10. Hence the Hebrew, we render *make*, is literally *cut*, a covenant. But what is still more to our purpose, the reference is to the use of calves in sacrifice, by divine appointment, under the law. Aaron was commanded, Lev. ix. 2. to
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“take a young calf for a sin-offering.” And we find verse 8. that he accordingly slew the *calf* he chose for that purpose, at the altar of the LORD. Now, we know that the law was a shadow of good things to come, and that these offerings and sacrifices were typical of Christ. Compare Col. ii. 17. with Hebrews, x. 1. How apt, then, this chosen similitude to lead us to Christ, who was made sin for us, when he gave himself an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet smelling favour! The application is easy and just, yea, and in a manner unavoidable; for the scene is no other than a representation of the joyful communion of believers with their reconciled God and Father in Christ, and therefore no other can be intended by this figure than the body of Jesus, in which he bore our sins on the tree, and through the offering of which his people are sanctified, whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed; on which we are called to feast by faith, and especially at the table of the Lord. Thus a portion of the sacrifices was to be eaten by the worshippers of old, both heathens and Jews, as the scriptures will prove, and these kind of sacrifices are referred to by the inspired writer to the Hebrews. ix. 12. when he says, “that Christ, our high priest, is entered into heaven, not with the blood of goats and of *calves*, but by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” By this blood alone the faithful are cleansed, and have boldness to enter into the holiest of all.

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In a word, it is in this body which was prepared from everlasting, and by the sacrifice of which reconciliation was made, that the Father delights in his people, and they, being justified by faith, joy in him, through the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom they have now received the atonement. Rom. v. 11.

THESE are the capital figures of the scene. The *father* represents the divine Father of mercy and grace, and his recovered son, a reformed and penitent sinner; the servants are gospel ministers, who are sent to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, whose justifying righteousness is the robe in the parable, with which stands connected the gift of the Spirit, a seal of adoption and love, compared to a *ring*, which is ever accompanied with an ability for walking uprightly in the statutes of the Lord, as becometh his saints, couched under the metaphor of *shoes*; and finally, here is *the fatted calf*, an emblem of the body of Jesus, offered in sacrifice for sin, by which believers have peace and communion with God; agreeable to the known early practice of making a covenant, by dividing this creature, its being appointed under the law as a typical sin-offering, and its frequent use in feasting among men. The like application, at least in several particulars, has been *suggested* by others, but I have attempted to *illustrate* and *prove* these ideas of the similitude from the evident use

of the like metaphors in other places, and their analogy with custom and truth, and I hope in some degree to the Reader's satisfaction. With this light about us we may hope to review the several parts of this gospel mystery with safety and advantage, but at present I shall close with two or three reflections. And,

I. BEHOLD, the kindness and wisdom of the LORD in condescending to assist our understanding in *spiritual* things, by an allusion to things which are *natural*. Parables are in this respect like the pillar in the camp of Israel, dark to them who are spiritually blind; they stumble haughty unbelievers, whose conceptions are carnal, but sweetly guide the humble, who open their ears to instruction. Thus the impenitent Jews heard them with prejudice, as it had been foretold; their hearts were gross, and their ears dull, under a judicial hardness. Isa. vi. 9. compared with Mat. xiii. 15. Having resisted the Holy Ghost in the prophets, they were left of God to their vain imaginations, and foolish conceits, under which they closed their eyes, and this manner of preaching the kingdom of heaven was an occasion of their fall; they had eyes but saw not, and could not hear with their ears, but they who were in a serious and earnest pursuit after the knowledge of Christ, and whose hearts were turned by the Spirit
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of grace to rejoice in the salvation of God; this was not only the most delightful, but the most striking method, being adapted to awaken their attention, and impress them with a just and strong idea of the things which belong to the gospel; a manner of teaching suited to our present state of existence, in which all our ideas of spiritual objects are raised through the glass of natural images, so that pertinent similitudes, taken from objects familiar in natural and civil life, are admirably fitted to convey instruction to the human mind, when rightly disposed, and it is no small instance of the divine wisdom and goodness of our Saviour that he considers our frame in this respect, and is pleased thus to illustrate the things of his kingdom: May he open our hearts to understand and embrace the mystery of his will, that his knowledge, being pleasant to our souls, may render us wise unto salvation! But, again,

2. WE may also admire the beautiful harmony of those sacred volumes, the Old and New Testament. In opening this scene, you see we have ascertained each character from a correspondent passage in the scripture of truth. There is no essential figure in this or any scripture draught, but what may be found in other parts of the divine oracles. Parables are a collection of metaphors, united and disposed by the wisdom

wisdom of God, to form a just and striking representation, or throw a strong light on the system of his grace, the figures of which are dispersed, and may be gathered out of that divine storehouse of spiritual treasure, the scripture of truth. And further,

3. IT may be useful to note that the ordinary means of understanding these sublime and mysterious passages of the bible, and indeed the *only* security against vain fancies and unprofitable conjectures, is to be governed by others more plain and easy, in which the figures that compose the draught are applied directly, or by evident consequence. The ancient and well known maxim, 'Scripture is the best expositor of scripture,' is hereby confirmed; a just and sound maxim, which demands our attention in nothing more, than in the expounding of parables; and with due respect to good and great men, I take leave to say, that, in my opinion, scarce any thing has more perplexed and confounded the enquirers after truth, than the liberty some such have taken to introduce their own fancies into these divine mirrors. Once more,

4. IT is manifest that a sober and just application of parables is not the least difficult part of the ministry of the word. They are a precious treasure of the church, but it requires a singular acquaintance

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with scripture, great assiduity, yea, and much skill and caution, to open and improve these mystical scenes with advantage. However early the ripeness of some men's judgment may be, in these divine mysteries, it is plain, from the untimely productions of others, that, too frequently ignorance and presumption emboldens men to begin their ministrations with these metaphorical parts of the inspired volume. These attempts are for those only whose spiritual senses have been exercised, which, in ordinary cases, requires time and experience; men may easily report from the writings of others, or speak their own fancies, but to declare the intendment of the Holy Ghost, from these divine riddles, to edification, is no easy matter: more than thirty years employment in the study of the scriptures has not enabled the author to tread this holy ground, when called to it, without singular caution and fear; and it is his heart's desire and prayer to the Father of lights, that no false idea may be raised in any one's mind by the present attempt. May his Spirit lead us into all truth. "Who so is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving kindness of the LORD."

SERMON

S E R M O N VI.

Luke xv.—from the 20th to the 24th verse inclusive.

And he arose and came to his father.—But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: But the father said to his servants; Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.

HAVING ascertained the capital figures in this wonderful and interesting scene, we now proceed to review and apply them for our spiritual improvement. It presents the prodigal returned to

his father, the compassion and readiness with which he receives him ; his investment with the privileges of a son, and the joy of the family on the happy occasion.

THE first thing which strikes us, and which demands our immediate attention, is the submission of this once rebellious young man ; he had formed the resolution on a fight of his wretchedness, and now it is accomplished without any delay. Many vows of reformation and repentance are made by transgressors in the prospect of eternity, that come just to nothing. Too often it is seen that the sinner, when threatened with death, and the judgment that awaits him, in the bitterness of his soul, makes solemn protestations of turning to God, if he is spared, when, alas, no sooner are the terrors of the Almighty removed, but the self-deceived wretch returns to his folly, and it may be proves worse than ever ; or if, peradventure, an alteration takes place, and he seems a new man for a season, it is quickly at an end, and as the morning dew, his goodness is vanished away. The like may be observed concerning many good purposes which occasionally arise in the natural mind, but prove abortive, through the flesh ; not so the example before us : This youth was moved by a real and deep conviction of his evil ; he was self-condemned, though he despaired not of
pardon,

pardon, and his resolution being on principle, was cordial and abiding, and therefore carried into execution the first opportunity; in like manner the sincere penitent, with an heart full of shame, whose tears are mingled with hope, immediately returns to the Lord in the prospect of mercy. The representation is just and exact to the real condition of a fallen creature, when his eyes are opened on himself. The circumstances of this dissipated youth would admit no delay; he is forlorn in every respect, and dying with hunger; he is also far distant from home, and in a very weak state, so that the journey itself must be dangerous; nevertheless, being persuaded that a miserable death would certainly ensue if he tarried in his present situation, and that, without speedy relief, there was no hope of life, which might be obtained on a timely application, he instantly pursues the resolution he had taken, being determined that if he did perish it should be in the fight, or at the door of his father. Happy the sinner who thus comes to God by his Son, for he is able to save to the uttermost.

AND *he arose and came to his father.* In this clause, when duly considered, we have an image of every thing essential to repentance. Indeed the prodigal's confession, verse 24, which is pertinently induced by his father's gracious compassion, is a fur-

ther instance of the disposition which prevails in a contrite soul, as will hereafter appear; but in this single sentence we have a compleat resemblance of the transgressor's conversion, which consists in his departure from sin unto God, Isa. lv. 7. Acts xxvi. 20. and it may be useful to examine the particulars.

FIRST, then, we are told that, *He arose*, i. e. instantly, and forsook his base service, laying aside his former vain expectation of satisfying himself with the husks of the swine, and quitting all hope of subsisting in his present condition, he immediately rises, and comes out of this land of the shadow of death, to his native country for life.

BUT, to whom does he apply?—To his father. *He arose and came to his father.* This was becoming and noble, and perfectly answers to the conduct of a penitent sinner, actuated by the Spirit of grace and adoption. This sensible youth, now perishing in consequence of his sinful behaviour, does not in a pitiful manner cringe to the servants of the house, much less steal in for a morsel of bread; nor is he so weak as to intreat his conceited, unnatural brother to intercede for him; that step had been fatal, as appears from what follows, for he that could not be reconciled to the kind and generous reception he

met with, most certainly would have prevented, rather than promoted his interest : as a man of understanding, he went to his father. To whom else should he go ? Against his father he had sinned, and his father alone could forgive him, and had a right to bestow the bread he sought after ; if every servant in the house had been his friend, and even his elder brother could have pitied him, unless his father was reconciled, what hope of success ? On the other hand, the good will of his father was sufficient ; if he was graciously pleased to admit and relieve him, notwithstanding his atrocious vileness, and aggravated guilt, neither the servants, nor yet his cruel and imperious brother, could hinder him from a place and portion of life ; his conduct is therefore to be justly admired. Such is the wisdom and courage of those who are led by the Spirit ; animated with a prospect of the peace procured by the blood of Christ's cross, they come boldly to a reconciled God for the remission of their sins.

NEVERTHELESS, this once abandoned young man must find it hard work ; he must be supposed to feel some degree of shame and trembling ; a man that had abused the goodness of so affectionate and bountiful a father, and wasted his substance in so abominable a manner, must be liable to many painful

ful doubts, yea, and a tormenting fear of being rejected, according to his desert; besides, which is very natural, upon the whole of the representation, admitting or supposing that he returned by the way that he went, it must occasion bitter reflections; almost every step and object in the way must remind him of his folly and madness, when he traversed this same road, and wickedly revolted from home, the consideration of which must pierce and overwhelm him. In like manner sometimes the awakened transgressor, when on his return to the Lord, is on reflection more and more laden with his iniquity, and sometimes at length so oppressed, that without a speedy application of pardoning mercy he must sink. Adored be our compassionate and faithful Redeemer, who invites all such depressed sinners to himself, with an assurance of rest, Matt. xi. 28. So that whoever comes to God, as this man is represented returning to his injured parent, with blushing and fear, but with hope of acceptance through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall obtain mercy.

I MAY appeal to the current of scripture, and the experience of the faithful for the justness of this exhibition, but the comparison will bear a more minute and critical review, on which it will be found, that

that the following lines, in this drawing, fitly resemble the conversion of a sinner.

1. HE come as one *alive from the dead*. Life, and some degree of strength, are manifest in the prodigal's return. *This my son was dead, and is alive again*. In his former state and course he was morally dead: "He that liveth in pleasure is dead whilst he liveth."

1 Tim. v. 6. This young *blood*, as rakes style themselves, was given up for lost, as profligates frequently are, by sober friends, who bewail their condition; but now, quickened and restored to his senses, he comes forth as Lazarus from the grave, and by his rising and coming back to his father, he appears to be received; thus it is with the mourning transgressor, he was dead in trespasses and sins, but his repentance proves him alive, and accordingly, on his confession, "he is buried with Jesus by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised by the glory of the Father, even so he also should walk in newness of life. Rom. vi. 4. In short, his coming to God is an evidence of that spiritual life, the powers of which are exerted in his return.

2. HE comes to his father with an *heartly good will*. It was the desire of his soul, and what he determined, on the deepest conviction of its infinite importance; this is his language, "*I will go, and will*

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say to my father. No man forced him from the situation he was in; the very expression of coming, which is a voluntary motion, implies that his will was much concerned, in this matter, his motive was cogent, in so much, that now he was not less ready to go back, than he formerly was to hasten away. In like manner true penitents are all willing-hearted; they come most freely to Christ for pardon and life, conformable to the terms of gospel invitations, particularly Rev. xxii. 17. "Let him that is *a thirst* come, and whoever *will*, let him come." Again,

3. In every change of this kind, we are to consider *what* a person forsakes, and to *what* he turns. Coming is a bodily motion, from one place or object to another. Whence the prodigal came, and whither he went, has already been seen. His harlots, and other lewd companions had forsaken him in his distress, and now, being convinced of his danger, he quits the country in which he had sunk all his substance, and saw himself ruined, and returns to his father, from whom he had foolishly revolted, determined to humble himself at his feet; persuaded that, notwithstanding his guilty and shameful condition, he might possibly find so much compassion as to be permitted to enter his doors, and abide in the house, at least with the allowance of a servant, I say, with this, peradventure, he sets out,
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for his mansion, where alone he expected to find him; for, who could have imagined that a parent thus abused, and so highly and justly offended, should voluntarily meet his rebellious child on the road, except in anger, to upbraid, and forbid him his presence? but an apprehension of this must have killed all his hope, and rendered him incapable of the attempt; on the other hand he could have no idea of his father running to him from a distance, with the astonishing pity and love represented; his intention, no doubt, was to go to the house, and there confess his transgressions, and utter unworthiness of being any more treated as son, that he might obtain the relief, without which he must inevitably perish; thus a converted sinner, being turned from darkness to light, forsakes all his thoughts, and evil ways, and comes to the Lord, who waits to be gracious.

And further,

4. IT merits our notice that this perishing youth is greatly encouraged in his return to his father, by the relation that subsisted between them; it is true, he had in contemplation the affluence and hospitality of his venerable parent, this was needful to raise his expectation and hope, but he is not solely, or principally animated from his riches and bounty; it was his *paternal character that prompted

* Sermon IV. p. 82.

him to repentance, and gave birth to this needful and noble resolution. He begins, verse 17, *How many hired servants of my father have bread enough, and to spare*; again, he says, *I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father*; it is also related, that his father saw him afar off: and further, that he said unto him, *Father*. Now the frequent repetition of father, plainly indicates that the prodigal's mind was much taken up with this endearing and interesting connexion, and that this greatly influenced him to return and submit. Indeed he was deeply convinced of his vileness, and frankly owns that he was utterly unworthy of the honourable relation; but that very acknowledgment proves that he considers himself as a *son*, and that the character of a *father* in the person, whose goodness he had shamefully abused, by his folly, inspired him with hope, and, was, no doubt, a singular and powerful motive to his resolution. Finally,

5. THE *end* of his return is another article of importance; he comes not for riches, honour, power or dainties, which would have favoured of pride and wantonness, and have impeached his sincerity, his desire is only to partake in the commons of the family, and that as an hired servant, and therefore not to eat the bread of idleness, as some slothful professors, who deserve censure. *In my father's*

ther's house there is bread enough, and to spare. Here is no sinister motive, nothing more than a becoming concern after *bread* to preserve him alive, and for which he is willing to labour. But this article has been anticipated in a former discourse, and is only mentioned here to complete the design.

THESE are the particulars to be noted in the prodigal's return*. He is manifestly alive, and in some degree of strength, and consequently as one raised from the dead, among whom he once lay, otherwise he could not have acted this part; his repentance was free from any external compulsion; it was the choice and desire of his soul, and consisted in a voluntary forsaking the country into which he had revolted, and all further connexions with its inhabitants, and manners, and going directly home to his offended and excellent parent, to which he was animated by the relation subsisting between them, and, in one word, his end was not carnal and vain; he sought nothing but salvation and life, which was sober and decent.

AND now, who needs much assistance in applying these things to the character designed? Can a

* It does not follow, that on a sinner's first repentance he is fully persuaded that he is a child of God. Herein that is a disparity between the shadow and the substance. See p. 79.

man that is conversant with his bible, or who is himself a subject, through grace, of repentance unto life, which is essential to real christianity, and a well grounded hope of salvation, be at a loss to discern the propriety and justness of the design before us? The analogy between this reformed youth, and a penitent sinner is obvious; nevertheless it may be useful to compare this painting with the original; and may the Reader's heart teach him; for to be totally and finally unacquainted with the change here described will be fatal! I trust, Friend, thou art not altogether a stranger to the power of God; however, this representation is verified in the experience of them who are called, in the following instances.

I. REPENTANCE *proceeds on regeneration.* * The necessity of a divine change in order to evangelical repentance has already been proved. In this they agree; it is an action of life; the dead cannot rise, neither can a natural man, who is dead in sin, repent and turn unto God; hence the conversion of the Ephesians is ascribed to the quickening grace of the Almighty, Ephes. ii. 1. "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Apost-

tate man is alienated from the life of God. Ephes. iv. 18. "His mind is *darkness*, yea and enmity itself, being in a state of rebellion," Rom. viii. 7. But the promise of the covenant is fulfilled in them who are called, which runs in these words, Ezek. xxxvi. 26. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart, out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." There must be spiritual life before there can be any perception or motion that is spiritual, and therefore it is impossible that the wicked should forsake his ways, and his thoughts, and turn unto the LORD, till renewed by grace; the Spirit must breath on the dry bones and inspire them with life, before they can rise up, or stand on their feet, and go forth in the ways of repentance and faith. So then, the man who is enabled to come unto God, believing in the name of his Son, for the remission of sins, is passed from death unto life, which, by the way, is good news for the contrite in heart. Again,

2. IT is no less certain that repentance is the sinner's *own act*, which he *freely* performs. Repentance and faith are the gifts of God. Acts xi. 18. Ephes. ii. 8. They are dispensed from Christ, who is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to bestow them, Acts v. 31. He turns the heart, as above, and im-

plants a principle of grace in his redeemed, who, being quickened, in a life of faith, exert themselves under the influence of his Spirit; nevertheless it is truly and properly the renewed sinner himself that repents and believes; faith and repentance are his own act and deed. This agrees with the * exhortations of John Baptist, our Lord, and his authorized apostles, and particularly Paul, who declares, Acts xxvi. 20. "that he shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, and turn to God." The first repentance of a sinner proceeds in the same manner with that of the return of sensible backsliders, and of the latter, we have an instance in Ephraim, Jer. xxxi. He was sensible that his heart must be disposed by divine grace before he could turn himself to the LORD, from whom he had foolishly departed, and accordingly beseeches, verse xviii. "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." Now if the hand of the LORD is required in the heart of a backslider, previous to his recovery, much more is it needful to the repentance of a natural man; Ephraim proceeds, "Surely, after that I was turned,

* Mat. iii. 2. Mark i. 15. also chap. vi. 12. and likewise Acts ii. 38. &c. &c.

I repented;" and again, "after that I was instructed," for this spiritual turn by the soul, is through divine illumination; "I smote on my thigh, and was ashamed, &c." Thus under a divine power, the subject is willing, Psalm cx. 3. The penitent's will is very much concerned in his turning to God, an hatred of sin, and a concern for the glory of God, no less than for his own remission and happiness, opens his heart to confession, and self-abasement, without any reserve; he neither hides his guilt, nor retains his own righteousness, but pleads for pardon as the fruit of sovereign grace, through the blood of Christ, of which he can never be worthy. This is a criterion by which to distinguish evangelical repentance from that which is legal; the former is cordial and free, whereas the latter is strained, and against inclination. But,

3. As the prodigal forsook the country into which he had withdrawn, and bid a final adieu to every companion and connexion, where he had sported himself in the time of his vanity, and went home directly to his father, in like manner the penitent is a new man in life, leaving his sinful acquaintance, he associates with them who fear God, and walk in the path of righteousness. Some obtain mercy who have ever been exceedingly vile in their conduct; their

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former course was literally and properly like that of the prodigal, lewd and extravagant; this was frequently the case when the gospel first spread in the nations of the world, which then lay in remarkable ignorance and vice, as at Corinth, &c. Thus some, who in times past notoriously fulfilled the desires of the flesh and the mind; being now taught by grace, deny worldly lusts, and by a chaste, sober life, manifest a real and wonderful change; being no longer servants of sin, but of God, and their fruit is unto holiness.

SELF-RIGHTEOUS persons, who look down on others, however penitent, with an haughty contempt, are offended at the grace bestowed on atrocious transgressors, as will hereafter appear, but, seeing they are cleansed, *such* do well to repent of their pride and vain glory.—Far be it to extenuate the vileness of the prophane, or to lessen the importance of a moral conduct in natural life; It is a great mercy, and of unspeakable advantage, in many respects, to be restrained from the grosser pollutions of the world, but no man shall claim in the salvation of God, or glory in his presence, on the merit of his comparative purity, for he justifieth the ungodly. Rom. iv. 5. Nor is there a just man on earth who needs no repentance:

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Never was a natural man so perfect in his conversation, as to leave no room for a visible change in his spirit and conduct, upon his conversion, at least in respect of a serious, humble, and consciencious deportment, which ought to distinguish the called from others; for however some may indulge to gaiety and pleasure, under a pretence of shunning a pharisaical religious grimace, as they scornfully term it; a light behaviour is highly unbecoming the christian, and inconsistent with the practice of piety; but there will be an alteration in the manners of those who are turned from sin unto God, without which all pretence to conversion is vain; nevertheless, true repentance is not *only* or *principally* to be discerned in the *life* of the subject: it appears first, and chiefly, in *secret*; evil thoughts and imaginations are abhorred and forsaken. Isa. lvi. 7. The enlightened know that the thought of foolishness is sin, and cannot indulge it; they are much concerned about the inward frame, and watchful lest any rising lust prevail and defile them; yea, and still further, as the prodigal appears to forsake his vain hopes, and foolish attempt of preserving life, short of humbling himself to his father; in like manner the convinced sinner quits all expectation of being saved short of repentance, and a participation in Christ; he will apply to no creature to commend him to mercy, but come directly to a reconciled

ciled God in Christ, confessing his sin, in prospect of remission, and life everlasting. Again,

4. THE similitude answers to the filial spirit, in which the penitent comes to the throne of grace. Indeed a full assurance of adoption is not essential to his character, but he that comes to God by Christ is not without hope of obtaining it. He considers the Almighty in the light, in which he graciously presents himself in that capital promise, 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." And again, Jer. iii. 19. He saith to backsliding Israel, "thou shalt call me my father." Transgressors either at first conversion, or on conviction of their folly, in future occasional revolts return to the Lord under these proclamations, of his covenant mercy and love; they come to him, not simply as to the all-sufficient Jehovah, from whose exuberant bounty every creature in heaven and on earth is supplied; their wants are supernatural, to be relieved only from the fullness of Christ laid up for those who are appointed to glory. It is the blessing of Abraham the penitent seeks, and nothing can satisfy him short of the chil-

dren's bread. He may not, as hinted, be confident of his sonship, which usually results from subsequent sealings of the Spirit, but he is drawn by the compassions of a reconciled Father, who waits to be gracious, and with whom there is plenteous redemption. True, the prodigal, whose character is borrowed from nature, however abandoned did not, neither could he lose sight of his being the son of his father, whose goodness he had abused, and from whom he revolted, no distance, or change of circumstances whatever, can obliterate from the mind of the most undutiful or profligate child his natural relation; herein, as in other instances, we are to note a disparity between the image and the object intended: the penitent sinner is no doubt a child of God, as appears by the grace bestowed on him; but then he may not discern it; he may, through a want of more compleat understanding, or being weak in faith, be incapable of appropriating this divine and interesting relation to God. Nevertheless, amidst all his self-abasement and fear, he is directed and encouraged by the promise, to confess unto God, and plead for his mercy, as the Father of his people; in no other view could he expect to receive the adoption, or obtain the blessings and privileges of a son. So then, in like manner as this young man dwelt much on his being a son, though

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undeserving the character; there is more or less of a filial spirit mingles itself in a sinner's return to the LORD; his expectation is connected with the hope of his covenant relation, which sustains him at the throne of grace, in hope of glory to come. Moreover,

5. As the sole and ultimate desire of this penitent youth was to obtain wholesome necessary food at the hands of his father, in a way of free bounty, so the awakened transgressor comes to God to be a partaker in Christ, the true living bread, according to the riches of his grace. His eye is on that meat which endureth to everlasting life, which the Son of man bestows on them who hunger and thirst after righteousness. John vi. 27. He himself says, verse 48. "I am that bread of life." This bread for the soul in the house of the LORD, Hose. xi. 4. contains all his desire; but that this, and this alone is the ultimate view of the penitent, has already been shewn*, and therefore I pass it. These are the particulars in which our prodigal and the returning sinner agree; they are both living and active subjects, who are cordial and free in their application

* Sermon IV. p. 47.

for mercy; as the one, so the other leaves his former customs and company, and enters on a new course of life, and as a child, seeks bread from his father, with an acknowledgment of his unworthiness to be called his son.

AND now, my dear friend, dost thou behold thyself in this divine glass? How stand thy features? Dost thou answer the picture? I hope thy repentance is visible; however, be it known that this fine just description is not for amusement, but to awaken thy attention; without the like repentance no man can be saved; therefore seriously examine, and deceive not thyself. O that such who are dead in sin were convinced of their danger, and saw the everlasting destruction hastening upon them! Behold the judge is at the door! The sound of this trumpet is awful: "Arise ye dead, and come to judgment!" Then the unbelieving wretch, who despised the grace of the gospel and would not come to Christ for life, shall be brought before him, when he takes vengeance on the disobedient, and sinks under the weight of his aggravated guilt, into shame and misery for ever!

BUT, is any one convinced of his wretchedness, let him come in like manner. God is reconciled in his Son; forgiveness is with him, yea, he will abundantly pardon. Arise, thou mournful transgressor,
and

and go to thy father ; say not, I am a rebel. That man is no rebel who sincerely laments his rebellion. If thine heart is turned against sin, open to confession, and the desire of thy soul runs after pardon and holiness, that thou mayst be at liberty for the service and fruition of him from whom thou hast strayed ; let nothing dismay thee. Behold the father most tenderly embraces his miserable and unworthy son ; such, such is the pity of the Lord towards the contrite in heart ; he is full of compassion, and waits to be gracious : Then, be of good cheer, adopt the language of the church, and say : “ Behold I come unto thee, for thou art the LORD my God.” This encouragement thou hast from the general report of the gospel, and the scene now before thee. Be confident then of the mercy and love held forth in this divine picture ; freely acknowledge thine iniquity ; he will not reject thee !

As to those who have obtained mercy, and tasted that the Lord is gracious, let them habitually come unto Jesus and live by faith upon him. We have daily need of repentance and renewed application to his blood for the cleansing of our sins, that under a joyful sense of pardoning mercy we may walk before our heavenly Father, as heirs of his grace and salvation, in every good word and work ; it will then

then appear that we have not, in vain, been baptized in the likeness of the death of our Saviour, but that we are indeed dead to sin, but alive unto God, with them who believe unto LIFE EVER-LASTING.



S E R M O N VII.

Luke xv.—20, 21.

————— *But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*

WE left the prodigal on his way, with a resolution to humble himself to his father, and have seen how exactly he answers in his spirit and conduct to that of a repenting transgressor, in pursuit after mercy and life. The scene now before us is tender and striking; it opens to our view the heart of God, and of man:—Of God, as recon-

conciled in his Son.—Of penitent man, when the subject of unmerited grace. This wonderful account begins with a particle, frequently used as a note of admiration, and never more justly. *He arose and went to his father; But, q. d. O astonishing! What manner of love! As he was travelling on, heavy laden, and ready to perish; lo, at a very great distance, his father perceives him; his bowels move, he runs swiftly to him, and in the most affectionate manner, falls upon, and embraces him; the son, melted under this generous unexpected compassion, prostrates himself at his feet, with a free confession of his folly and guilt.*

WE are now to consider the conduct of each. And, First, It is related of the father that, “*when his son was yet a great way off, he saw him.*” Note, the young man is not represented as seeing his father: No, his condition is like that of the * publican;

* Luke xviii. 13. The publican, in whom also we have the character of a penitent, is represented as *standing afar off*, which I apprehend conveys a similar, or rather the same idea with the prodigal's distance, when his father first discerned him; they intimate the fear and confusion that attend a deep sense of sin, before relief is obtained, and the awful distance at which the confessor cries out for mercy; nor is it unnatural to suppose that a person in the circumstances of this returning transgressor,

lican, "not able so much as to lift up his eyes unto heaven!" But his father saw him, and knew him to be his son, notwithstanding his very different appearance from that which he made when he went away from him. He is supposed to depart in the vigour of youth, gay, healthy and strong, dressed out with his portion in his hand; his countenance florid and smiling, and with every token of joy; but now he returns † emaciated, forlorn, and miserable, all in tatters, or rather naked, without a

gressor, should pause, in a manner overwhelmed with a sense of his evil, and the fears of being dealt with according to his desert. And this view admitted, throws a singular lustre on the conduct of the father, when he ran to meet and embrace him: However, many can witness that the awakened sinner is liable to painful and piercing doubts, under which he may be tempted to go back, or lie down in despair. Thanks be to God, his abounding grace in Christ Jesus is more than sufficient to bind up the broken in heart, and inspire them with courage and hope.

† The particulars are naturally supposed from the general circumstances of the prodigal, described in the beginning of the parable; and since images of spiritual things, taken from sensible objects, must needs be short of their original, it is but reasonable to extend these figures to the utmost; for after all, it is a very faint representation of apostate man, who is deformed, unrighteous, and sunk in corruption, from his native order and beauty, to an unspeakable degree. No natural state of body, or worldly circumstances, can be so abominable and wretched as to afford an adequate idea of fallen man's deplorable condition.

shoe to his foot, his face foul with weeping, dejected and pale; in this wretched condition, with eyes sunk in his head, or cast down on the ground, who would have taken him to be the same person? Yet, behold, under all this disguise, he is known of the father, who saw it was his own son, the son whom he had given up for lost, and as one dead and gone! This is the more extraordinary, considering their very great distance, which supposes, that there was an extensive view from his house, and that his eye was on the country from whence his son was returning. It is well known that the seats of great men, who answer to the character of the father in this representation, are usually built on an eminence, and every way contrived for a prospect. This indeed is a circumstance purely ornamental, though not without some analogy to spiritual things; beautiful for situation, is mount Zion, in heaven or on earth! But the father's looking towards his son, finely insinuates the intention of the Almighty on his chosen, when afar off, in their sins; and the parent who has been exercised with the extravagance of a rebellious child, yet, dearly beloved, will see the propriety, and feel the force of this passage. O how natural for a tender father, thus bereaved of a son, in whom he delighted, to have his mind towards the place whither he is revolted, and is sporting

sporting away his substance in the paths of misery and destruction; how is he, as it were, looking, listening, and earnestly wishing his return, though it may be without hope! His son he still is, notwithstanding his wickedness, and though hardened in sin, and without any filial affection, he cannot withdraw his heart from him. Thus the father in the parable is represented as looking from his mansion and discerning the prodigal at a distance, † which by the way is not supposed on his departure, for, alas, what sensible parent could bear to behold his dear child resolved on a course which must end in his ruin! But,

2. How does it strike him? Did it awaken his resentment, and fill him with indignation and wrath? He might justly have ordered a servant to upbraid him with his folly, and forbid his proceeding any farther, or have turned away in anger, and left him in despair. Earthly parents, however, in too many instances, withhold due correction, to the

† This is not altogether disagreeable to the account we have of the apostacy of man, who appears to have revolted by the fatal transgression, as it were in the absence of the LORD, and not at the season when he graciously condescended to walk in the garden, as he was wont to do, in the cool of the day. Gen. iii. 8.

ruin of their children, yet sometimes are found to discourage them from repentance, by a fatal severity ; but the Father of Spirits, here intended, is not subject to the passion of a man, he is ever merciful and gracious to the sensible sinner, as appears in the exhibition before us, in a beautiful gradation.

1. *He had compassion.* He no sooner beheld his unworthy son, though in a shameful and miserable condition, advancing for mercy, but the founding of his bowels is perceived ; his eye melts his heart, insomuch that he is sensibly touched with a feeling for the object of his love in distress, notwithstanding his former provocations. The like pity is found with our heavenly father, towards all who repent. Psalm lxxxvi. 15. " But thou, O LORD, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, plenteous in mercy and truth." This hope the church hath under a sense of her backslidings ; " he will have compassion upon us." Micha vii. 19. Also when Ephraim bemoaned himself and smote on his thigh, the Lord thus saith, Jer. xxxi. 20. " Is Ephraim my dear son ? Is he a pleasant child ? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still, therefore MY BOWELS are troubled for him. I will surely have mercy on him." Such is the kindness and pity of God towards all who mourn their iniquity. Again,

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2. THE father thus yearning towards his son waits not his coming, but immediately ran with all speed to embrace him. The expression here used, is peculiar and strong, and alludes to the swiftness of a racer*. Indeed the prodigal himself seems in no condition for running; poor creature, through weakness by fasting, the length of his journey, without any refreshment, and want of light cloathing, particularly shoes, he is rather at a stand, or at least so fatigued as to find it hard to drag on, and far from being able to hasten his pace; a circumstance most pertinent and natural, as it tended to quicken his merciful parent. In like manner the penitent sinner, with his heart overwhelmed, is sometimes ready to sink under a sense of his vileness, and would certainly faint if the LORD did not mercifully extend the arm of his grace, and sustain him. But,

3. As a further token of his love, lo, *he fell on his neck and kissed him.* An eastern custom, extremely

* *Δραμων*. Hence the dromedary, i. e. a creature little known in these parts, but it appears from the instance of Mordecai, Esther viii. 10. to be a swift beast, used for expedition: writers say it will run with a prodigious weight, 100 miles in a day, and with very little sustenance; so that they who call the slow and dull man by this name, as some, either do it ignorantly, or by an antiphrase, i. e. in a sense contrary to the proper signification of the word.

natural on certain tender occasions, as in the instance of Esau with Jacob, till they both wept. Gen. xxxiii. 4. And again, in chap xlv. 14. we find Joseph washing the neck of Benjamin his brother, with tears of compassion and joy; in like manner also the disciples parting with their beloved apostle. Acts xx. 37. It is remarkable that the kissing was all on the side of the father; no doubt the son would have gladly returned it, but at present he was ashamed and confounded for his rebellion and wickedness, and the more as he was treated with such amazing condescension and grace; this excited an abhorrence of his vileness, and confirmed his resolution to humble himself, so that he was rather disposed to confession than greeting. In a state of confirmed communion with God, the believer is sometimes enabled to answer the sweetness of his fruition with delight, and joy in the Almighty, his soul cleaves to the LORD, and he embraceth him with a strong and lively affection; then he can say, "I love thee, O LORD, my strength, my Redeemer!" and appeal to his Omniscience for the cordial and superlative esteem he bears to his name; but the first discovery of divine compassion to a contrite sinner, is for the most part returned in a way of humiliation, like that of Abigail, on David's condescension and kindness, in the proposal he made. 1 Sam. xxv. 41. "Behold, let thine handmaid be

a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." Thus in the instance before us; *make me as one of thy hired servants.* This naturally leads to the conduct of the son. And how does he behave under this astonishing tenderness and love? Does he forget his shame, and recede from his former resolution? Is he vainly puffed up by the gracious reception he meets with, or doth he presume on the loving kindness of his father, and cover his iniquity in silence? Quite the reverse. Behold he lies in the dust, and with deep contrition of soul frankly owns his sin and unworthiness! He is prostrate at the feet of his generous and affectionate parent, abasing himself to the utmost of his power! And here observe,

FIRST, the character under which he addresses him: *Father.* We have already seen that a filial spirit belongs to the penitent; this is still kept in view, that we may remember the relation under which the Almighty is propitious to them who acknowledge their transgressions; namely, that of the Father of mercies, in a new and everlasting covenant, ratified in the blood of his Son. Again, note his free and ample confession:

I. HE acknowledges his guilt: *I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight.* As hinted before,

disobedience to parents is a sin against heaven, an heinous transgression in the sight of God, who will surely avenge it on the rebellious child, unless he repents, therefore let him beware and own his offence to God and his injured parent, before it be too late. But sin in its primary view is alone against God; and accordingly the confession of David, runs in this language, Psalm li. 4. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."

2. His utter unworthiness is not the least article in his confession; this he carries to the utmost extent: and, says he, *am no more worthy to be called thy son*. He is not content with owning himself mean and worthless in his present guilty and shameful condition, and that, in these circumstances, he had no pretence to a desert of being counted a son, but declares himself incapable for ever of deserving the honourable and interesting character; NO MORE *worthy to be called thy son*. Far from the haughty vain conceit of the Papists, who indeed renounce all merit of the first grace, as they style it, but, then, boast in their works in a state of regeneration; this man disclaims all pretence to merit *for ever*; he owns himself *eternally* unworthy, being persuaded that it was impossible for him by any future obedience, or suffering whatever, to deserve to be

be treated as a son by his father, whom he had so greatly abused; nor is there any thing further from the thoughts of the enlightened sinner than his desert of the blessings of adoption, though short of these he cannot be happy; he has not the least distant prospect of meriting the character or portion of a son, by any thing in his power for ever, but will readily own that he is totally and finally undeserving the loving kindness of his heavenly Father, so that all his dependance is alone on free grace.

THE sum is, the prodigal, returning home, in the most forlorn and deplorable circumstances, when yet a great way off, is perceived by his father, who, moved with compassion, ran straightway up to him, and in the most endearing manner embraced him; this undeserved pity and love melts down the rebel, insomuch that he humbles himself in the dust, and frankly owns his aggravated guilt, and his being for ever incapable of deserving to inherit the privileges of a son. A most lively picture this of a convinced transgressor, and the ways of the LORD, with them who repent and turn unto him, from which the following particulars may be noted,

I. "THAT sin has placed man at an awful distance from God." If this young man was a great way off, when his father first saw him, at how much greater

greater distance before he set out? It was a far country into which he had revolted. In like manner apostate man is far, very far off; yea, and if grace prevent not, he is at an eternal distance from the Almighty, for he will certainly be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the LORD, who will say unto the wicked, "Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." This separation of man in the kingdom of satan is expressed in Ephesians, chap. ii. 13. "But now, says the apostle, in Christ Jesus, ye who were some time AFAR OFF are made nigh by the blood of Christ." To confine this to their being destitute of the means of grace, which they had now through mercy obtained; seems very unreasonable, since they are said to be "quickened, when dead in trespasses and sins, as the fruit of the Father's great love, to be saved by grace, through faith;" and further, to be "his workmanship created in Christ Jesus," &c. peculiar and striking phrases, which can never terminate in a bare enjoyment of external privileges, if there are any divine operations. Thus sinners are distant from God, as they are under his righteous displeasure, in a state of disobedience, and in a perishing condition. Salvation is far from the wicked, not because they *have not*, but because they *seek not* God's statutes. Psalm cxix. 155. "And lo, says the prophet, they that are far from
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from thee shall perish." Psalm lxxiii. 27. and again, Psalm cxxxviii. 7. "The proud he knoweth afar off." In a word, no distance of place from any object, is equal to that of guilty man from his Maker, an awful and everlasting distance, unless he is graciously received to a timely repentance, as appears from the case of the voluptuous rich man, Luke xvi. 23. who, in torments, lifts up his eyes to Abraham, in heaven, afar off, but could find no relief. Behold a great gulph is fixed, so that there was no passing from one state to the other! A line of separation is drawn by the curse of the law, between God and its transgressor, under which is a bottomless pit, no less insatiable, which for ever divides them, in the unseen and everlasting world. Thus fallen man is driven from the Almighty, to a distance from his favour, not less than that between heaven and hell, which is eternal; he is banished for ever, unless made nigh by the blood of Christ, who is exalted to give repentance and pardon, having suffered for sin, that he might bring us to God, who in mercy devised the wonderful expedient, that his banished might not be expelled for ever from his presence. Again,

IN this picture we behold the "early and favourable notice which a reconciled God takes of the returning heavy laden sinner." Indeed the eye of the LORD

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is on his chosen from everlasting; even while in their sins, they are preserved in Christ Jesus, and called, Jude i. and accordingly he saith to Paul when at Corinth, "I have much people in this city." But the exhibition before us is that of his regard to a convinced sinner, from his very first step towards repentance; as the father saw his son coming, when yet afar off, the LORD sees the penitent from the beginning; his heart is no sooner broken under a sense of his sin, and thirsting after righteousness, but every intention, groan, or prayer, however secretly or imperfectly expressed, is beheld by the omniscient and merciful Jehovah with delight. Thus we read, Ezek. xvi.—"When none eye pitied Jerusalem, behold, says the LORD, thou wast cast out in the open field to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born, and when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, live;" and again, "Thy time was the time of love, and I spread my skirt over thee," &c. In like manner he regards every mourning transgressor, from the moment he is under conviction, seeking life, and crying from his heart, I am vile; I perish! "When thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee," says our Lord to Nathaniel, John i. 50. With the same eye of pity and love he beholds a self-condemned penitent, in secret, pouring out his soul with strong cries and tears,

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for his iniquity; as in the instance of Ephraim, already referred to, his bowels move for him, he will surely and freely forgive him.

INDEED we may justly be astonished at this marvellous grace! It is truly wonderful that the infinitely holy and blessed Jehovah should thus concern himself, and delight in the relief and salvation of a rebel in his misery; but, as the heavens are high above the earth, so great are the ways of his mercy towards them that fear him! Nevertheless, our wonder at the pleasure the Lord takes in the humble, will as it were, resolve into gratitude and praise, when we consider this repentance is comely in itself, and agreeable to his will; nothing is more amiable than the return of a contrite sinner, with weeping and supplication unto God; besides, it is according to his purpose, and the effect of his grace: A real penitent is a visible object of divine love, in whom the power of God is manifest; it must needs be acceptable to the Lord to behold a chosen vessel of mercy return a meet subject of the honours and privileges laid up for his children, in the enjoyment of which they will glorify his name. And further,

As the father in the parable, ran immediately to his son, *fell on his neck, and kissed him*; even so, “the LORD is ready to meet the humble soul with

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the tokens of his love." He waits to be gracious, that he may "heal the broken in heart, and bind up their wounds." Psalm cxlvii. 3. Of this we have abundant assurance: it is the tenor of all vocations, directions, and promises in the gospel. What less than running to meet and embrace mourning sinners, is to be seen in the following evangelical passages: "Come now let us reason together, saith the LORD, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isa. i. 18. and again, chap. lv. 1. "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price." Is it any other than a gracious advance to the sinner afar off, when the LORD sends his heralds after them, as in the case of his rebellious people, Jer. iii. 12. "Go proclaim these words towards the north, and say; Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon thee, for I am merciful." Under the like proclamation, Hosea xiv. 1. the people no sooner return with the confession and prayer he prescribes, but, O astonishing grace! he saith, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him." Yea, and further, Isa. lxv. 24. "Before they call I will answer, and whilst they are yet speaking,

speaking, I will hear." This perfectly corresponds with the gracious words of our great divine Saviour, who has reconciled us unto God, by his death, and in whose name repentance and remission of sins is preached in the world. They declare his readiness to receive every one that labours under the weight of his iniquity, and seeks after righteousness and life. Did he not meet the woman of Samaria? John iv. 10. "If thou knewest the gift of God; and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." In like manner we read, chap. vii. 37. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." And how open his heart, and wide spread the arms of divine grace to receive the perishing sinner, without any exception, in that most engaging invitation Mat. xi. 28. "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And especially in connexion with John, vi. 37. "All that the Father giveth me, shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." But to recite every instance of this grace, would be in a manner to transcribe the whole bible. The LORD is, as it were, statedly running in the ministry of his word, to receive the penitent transgressor, insomuch that no sooner is a man con-

vinced of his ruin, and seeking his salvation, but a promise is ready to meet him, as appears from the specimens given. If the awakened sinner, instead of listening to his own carnal reason, or the suggestions of satan, would attend to the counsel of God, he would see the Father of mercies, with bowels of pity, advancing towards him, in the riches of his grace; and many are witnesses to the wonderful and seasonable visitation of his favour, on them who wait at his throne in private, or are on the point of confessing his name, before men, in testimony of their obedience and hope. Once more,

DID the prodigal humble himself as he had vowed in his trouble, and was this confession made under the embraces of his father? In like manner the resolutions of a sincere penitent are performed without delay, in prospect of reconciliation. The awakened soul being deeply convinced that he is eternally lost in himself, on a view of the hope set before him in the gospel, will flee for refuge to lay hold upon it; he will lie in confusion before a merciful God, and own himself vile. This is the language of his heart: I will confess my transgressions; and this he doth quickly, and without any reserve. Psalm xxxii. 5. It is rare if ever that an enlightened sinner can rest till he has found some corner to fall on
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his knees, and acknowledge his iniquity, that he may obtain remission of sins, and in proportion to the evidence of this, his soul is still more humbled within him, for it is in the nature of forgiveness to abase its sensible subject. Ezek. xvi. 63. Nor will any thing short of a pardon bring a man self-condemned to a frank confession in the sight of his judge. Indeed a faith of reliance may exist where the subject is in doubt of his state, and fearful of ranking among the children of God: nevertheless, whoever trusts in Christ is warranted, to expect salvation and life, in the hope of which it becomes him to wait in his house. Every believer is in a *state* of fellowship with the Father, through his Son Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, Ephes. ii. 18. and the more the love of God is shed abroad in his heart, the deeper his sense of an utter unworthiness to receive the adoption of sons. A dignified station, superior talents, popular esteem, or visions and revelations, either imaginary or real, may suit the carnal mind, and exalt a man above measure, of which we know the apostle himself was in danger, 2 Cor. xii. 7. but a sense of forgiving love, and communion with God, will ever be accompanied with the profoundest humility.

THESE, my dear Reader, are the points in which the prodigal and a penitent agree: was he at a
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very great distance from his father, even so fallen man, in his natural state, is far from the Almighty; did his father soon perceive his dear son and hasten to embrace him, no less early is the gracious notice of a reconciled God, and his readiness to pardon the contrite transgressor; and further, as this young man humbled himself under the compassion of his generous and affectionate parent, in like manner the loving kindness of the LORD will melt the sinner into self-abasement, and engage him to an unreserved confession of all his iniquity.

Is this the state of mankind, and are these the ways of the Lord with transgressors? How inexcusable the folly of those who neglect his salvation! To be far from God is the shame and misery of the creature, but, alas, in the kingdom of darkness it is not perceived! Hence pride, presumption, and a fatal security spreads through the world! It is awful to behold the stupidity of man, under the guilt and dominion of sin, and that even where the light of revelation shines. There, O thou impenitent sinner, thou art presented in thy chains and thy vileness! The wrath of God is upon thee, and thy judge at the door! But, at the same time, here is opened a way of relief: It is an *high* and *free* way, and every perishing soul is invited to Christ, with an assurance of pardon, and a justifying righteousness

ness through faith in his blood. If thou neglect this glorious salvation, how wilt thou answer the charge of unbelief in the last and great day, when the wrath of the Lamb shall come on those who despise him! thou canst not plead ignorance, nor wilt thou be able to say that there was no hope for thee, if thou hadst turned unto God, and obeyed the gospel of his Son, neither thy name nor thy condition is excepted in the proclamation of grace: Wilt thou urge, *I could not* repent and believe? Let conscience speak: Is it thy *desire* to do it? if not, how vain thy pretence of inability? Besides, this plea will surely condemn thee, for thy impotence is moral; it is owing to the pride and naughtiness of thy heart, the enmity of which against God, appears in proportion to the free remission set forth in the name of the Redeemer, which unbelievers despise. Thou wilt at last be obliged to acknowledge that righteous is the LORD in thine eternal destruction. O the madness and guilt of those who continue in rebellion, notwithstanding the warnings against disobedience, and the rich discoveries of mercy to them that believe! If thou continuest impenitent, this exhibition of sovereign grace, verified in the experience of millions, on earth and in heaven, who, with all holy angels, witness that the LORD will abundantly pardon, must rise up in judgment against thee, to thy shame and everlasting contempt! Again,

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IN this gospel mirror, the penitents are encouraged and directed to come unto God by Christ, as this prodigal did to his father; i. e. in all their vileness and guilt. Say not, O perishing soul, my transgressions are heinous, and innumerable; mine iniquity is great! It is not *sin*, but *impenitence* and *unbelief*, that is a bar to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. He is a God not afar off, behold his righteousness is at hand, in the imputation of which he hath no respect to any thing in the subject but his *unrighteousness*, for he *justifieth the ungodly*. Rom. iv. 5. This is the testimony of God, Rom. x. 8, 9. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Come then, naked and unworthy as thou art, for in this view alone thou art the object of mercy; attempt no other preparation; thy broken heart shall not be despised. Seek not to claim in the blessing on account of any thing better in thyself than the vilest transgressor; it is a vain imagination, there being no such title to the grace of the gospel: Only acknowledge thine iniquity, and declare all thy sin, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt know that God is faithful and just to forgive

give thy sins, and to cleanse thee from all unrighteousness.

To conclude: Hast thou, beloved, obtained mercy thus to believe on the name of the Son of God, and received the spirit of adoption? Ever keep in view thine utter unworthiness of this high and heavenly calling, and walk humbly with thy God to the end of thy days: Thou hast nothing to boast of before him. Nothing can be more opposite to the hope of the gospel, or the christian character, than pride and self-vaunting; therefore, adoring the grace conferred on thee, put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, humbleness of mind. Marvellous the love "which the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" Remember, ye heirs of salvation, once children of wrath, ye are indeed *now* the sons of God, who has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, yet it doth not appear what ye shall be; the glory of seeing Christ as he is, at his appearance and kingdom, is unutterable: "but we know we shall be like him." "He will change *even* our vile body, that it may be fashioned like to his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able, even to subdue all things to himself." The subject of this blessed hope will most certainly purify himself. Then, let us, "gird

up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as obedient children, not fashioning ourselves according to our former lusts, in our ignorance, but as he which hath called us is holy, so may we be holy in all manner of conversation," that we may not be ashamed before him, at his coming.



SERMON

S E R M O N VIII.

Luke xv.—22, 23, 24.

But the father said to his servants ; Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet ; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry : For this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

WHEREVER we turn, there is new cause of wonder ! The providential goodness of the Almighty to man, whose apostasy and guilt has rendered him the object of his righteous displeasure, has been the admiration of the sensible, in every

age; how marvellous then the dispensation of pardon and life, to a self-condemned sinner, who comes to God by his Son, in whom he has reconciled the world to himself, a shadow of which is before us!

HAVING seen the abounding compassion of the father, in the parable, on his miserable son, we now pass to a still more striking instance of his unmerited love. As the son was humbling himself under the embraces of his most affectionate parent, with a frank and ample acknowledgment of his guilt, on a sudden, he is graciously prevented from proceeding any further. It must be highly pleasing to behold his once foolish child, whom he no more expected, recovered to a sense of his folly, prostrate at his feet, and imploring undeserved mercy, but, he waited to bless him, and, being persuaded that his repentance was genuine, as it were, turns away his ear, and calls upon his servants, already astonished, to open his treasury, and invest the penitent youth, who was on the point of declaring his unworthiness, with every token of freedom and honour, and prepare for an elegant feast, in which they might rejoice: A fit emblem this, of that divine grace which triumphs in the exaltation of a sinner, who humbleth himself for his iniquity.

AN event so unexpected and interesting, demands our particular notice. The Reader will recollect that the prodigal had resolved to add further, *make me as one of thy hired servants*. But, when on the verge of that self-abasing sentence, with which he proposed to finish his confession, his generous parent, against whom he had rebelled, breaks in upon him, in the manner represented, q. d. ‘My dear son, it is enough; no more of this; thy repentance is sufficient, I am satisfied, and freely forgive thee; thy heinous transgressions are removed, and shall no more be remembered; thou art my dear son, a pleasant child, bewailing thy folly; I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, and will receive thee in my house, as a son: Here, servants; produce the best robe, and put it upon him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf; let us eat and rejoice, seeing this my son, once revolted and gone, and given over for lost, is returned safe and sound, as one alive from the dead*.’

* A candid Reader will not misinterpret this, or any like phrase that may occur, as an intended emendation. The above is partly the express words of the parable, and the rest seems the language of the father's conduct towards his penitent son, and so exactly agrees with the scripture account of the grace which our heavenly Father bestows on those who repent, that it is hoped the illustration may be admitted.

SUCH are the ways of the Lord with mourning transgressors, and thus the Father of mercies will deal with the objects of his love, whom he has quickened by his grace, to a sense of their backslidings and guilt; they are often in confusion; their hearts overwhelmed, yea, and sometimes almost in despair, but he dissipates their fears, and graciously prevents them with the blessings of his love. Psalm xxi. 3. It is not easy to describe the terror and distress to which a rebellious child must be liable, when returning to his injured parent, sensible of his wickedness, in having viciously ruined himself, to the disgrace of his family, much less can we fully express the anxiety and grief of a convinced sinner, while doubtful of his obtaining remission; but our God is merciful to cover the transgressions of the perishing convict; nor shall backsliding Israel be rejected; the sins of those who have been enlightened, are unspeakably more aggravating, than any committed in a state of ignorance and unbelief, yet so abounding is the grace of God in Christ Jesus, that even these are forgiven on repentance; hence Micah, in the name of the church, chap. vii. 18, 19. with an holy admiration, cries out, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage—He will have compassion upon us, he will subdue our iniquities, thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of

of the sea." Joyful tidings unto those who, as doves in the valley, are every one mourning for his iniquity! Lift up your heads, ye contrite souls, whose bones he hath broken, and trust in the LORD, for with the LORD there is mercy, and plenteous redemption.

BUT this divine mirror requires a more particular consideration, I shall, therefore take leave to detain the Reader, while I enquire into the reason, why the prodigal was cut short of his intended confession? take notice of the manner in which he was interrupted, open the mystery of the feast, and then attend to the father's recital on the happy occasion: These articles will be followed with some remarks, and finish this part of the scene.

FIRST, Why is this penitent restrained from saying, as he resolved—*make me as one of thy hired servants?* A question started, not on account of its being difficult to assign a motive to this unexpected prevention, but rather to obviate a mistaken notion of its being unreasonable or improper. Thus an eminent expofitor: 'He was not allowed to say these words because this could not be granted, for, says he, a son is always a son, and cannot become a servant.' But with submission, the text affords no ground for this suggestion, and that respectable
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writer is mistaken when he says, on verse 22, 'that the prodigal desired to be an hired servant *;' for, as hinted already, he resolved to say, *make me AS one of thy hired servants*. The difference is clear and essential. It is more to the purpose

* I see no sufficient ground for asserting with Doctor Collins, the continuator of Mr. Pool's Annotations on the Gospel, that the last clause of the prodigal's intended confession, verse 19, though not here repeated, is to be understood; much less that the reason for his proceeding no further was, because it would have favoured of legality to have desired to be a slave, as some others, I think, inadvertantly suggest, for it does not appear that this was ever his design; besides, had he altered his mind, with respect to his being made AS an hired servant; for those are his words, he would naturally have dropt it of himself, on which supposition, a certain † writer applauds his good sense, 'It being needless, says he, after he was acknowledged in the capacity of a son;' but it should be considered, that although his father's Kifs, and other instances of compassion and love, may well be interpreted a token of his readiness to pardon, he had not yet conferred on him the privileges of a son; nor is it agreeable to the genuine spirit of a penitent to abate of self-humiliation, on the assurance of forgiveness. Upon the whole, I cannot but acquiesce in the opinion of the great Mr. Henry, Mr. Hervey, and other judicious expositors, much esteemed for their labours, that the prodigal did neither forget, nor lay aside any part of his former resolution, but that the true and sole reason why he did not finish his design was, that his father interrupted him, whose preventing grace is to me very obvious, and indeed one of the most striking turns in the parable.

† How, on the parable. p. 208.

what another writer observes, namely, ‘ That this part of the penitent’s intended confession, reflects on the servile condition unto which he had reduced himself by his shameful revolt; and the request he would have made is a most lively expression of the deep sense he had of his unworthiness, and what a mercy he should esteem the meanest station with his father;’ but this by no means proves that he could relinquish his character, or even wish to be a servant. It is inconsistent with evangelical repentance to desire to be an hired servant, *μισθιω*, i. e. a mercenary: The penitent seeks to be free, nor will he be satisfied with any thing short of the adoption of a son, accordingly the prodigal never drops his relation; this alone is the ground of his hope; you may as well suppose a man in his circumstances to despair and destroy himself, as to imagine that he can wish for, or acquiesce in being deprived of the character of a child.

THE scope of the parable, is the language of a sensible sinner, who is led by the Spirit; now it cannot with decency be imagined, that one under the conduct of that infallible guide, should seek or desire any thing wrong in itself, or impossible in the nature of things; to insinuate this, would be to impeach the Holy Ghost. Indeed the real penitent may err, but not when under this divine influence,

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which is no doubt the case when humbling himself at the footstool of mercy for pardon and life, he cannot desire any thing inconsistent with the constitution and methods of grace revealed in the gospel, in which sinners are encouraged to come to God by Christ, as to a reconciled Father, ready to forgive and to confer every blessing of his love on them who stand in need of salvation.

THE honour of God and the credit of internal religion will not admit a supposition that a man under the direction of the Holy Ghost may form a wrong judgment of his state, or that his apprehensions of himself should prove a mere imagination; it would then follow that his feelings under the divine operations are enthusiastical deceptions; an impious conceit that strikes at the foundation of experimental religion. If the transgressor who bewails his guilt, and the course he is under, is not really and properly in that state of condemnation in which he views himself, antecedent to his repentance, he is certainly under a delusion; his tears, confession and prayers, are but the fruit of ignorance and a misguided conscience, which cannot be acceptable to a Being of infinite wisdom and truth; but man is shapen in iniquity, and when his eyes are opened on his wretchedness, must behold himself under a sentence of death, by the law he has broken, till Christ

is formed in him the hope of righteousness and glory; nor is any man pronounced in scripture free from condemnation, till washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus, by the Spirit of our God. In whatever sense the chosen may be justified in the sight of the omniscient and eternal God, it must consist with the condition the awakened find themselves in, which is that of being children of wrath by nature; nor can there be any reasonable doubt that the blessing of Abraham descends on the heirs of the promise, or that they receive the Spirit of adoption, through faith. Gal. iii. 14. In a word, it is by no means defensible that the apprehensions, desires, or petitions of a sinner under the influence of the Spirit of grace, may be improper, or unbecoming, much less can they be delusive or imaginary; nor is the penitent in the parable prevented on any such account, there being nothing unsuitable to his circumstances in what remained of his intended confession; he is put by, purely out of tenderness and love, and to shew the exceeding kindness and grace of the father, who represents the Father of mercies, who is full of compassion, to pass by the iniquity of the vilest transgressor who repents, and enrich him with freedom and righteousness, according to the tenor of the gospel, in which the superabounding grace of a sin-pardoning God is set forth, that none

might despair, and that unbelievers, who perish in their sins, may be silent for ever.

HAVING stated the reason of the unexpected prevention this penitent met with, in the course of his confession, let us a moment advert to the *manner* in which his father restrained him. And here we are struck with a generosity and affection, to be paralleled only in the munificence of a covenant God, to the objects of his love, this scene is intended to illustrate: He is prevented by the sudden and immediate grant of every token and privilege appertaining to that filial relation, of which he knew himself unworthy.

It is known that vassals or slaves were not allowed the robe and other ornaments with which the prodigal is invested; but notwithstanding his low opinion of himself, and the contempt of his ill-natured brother, his father esteems him, and with every mark of distinction and favour, proclaims him his son: Unmerited love! love, beyond all description! To have received the forlorn wretched creature into his house, and treated him as a servant, would have far exceeded his desert, but to forget all his transgressions, and grant him such privileges; to put the best robe upon him, with a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and, as it were, rejoice in advancing

vancing the rebel to the honour and felicity of a child, in whom he delighted, is truly astonishing! Yet faint the resemblance; yea, infinitely short of the marvellous grace of a reconciled God, in the pardon and acceptance of a penitent, through his son Jesus Christ, which is the thing here exhibited. In every instance of this abounding mercy, God justifies the ungodly, and imputes a righteousness to the object, which he himself had no hand in producing; he covers the naked soul with a robe of salvation, as with gold, that he may be comely for ever in his sight, as an heir of the eternal inheritance, of which he has an earnest in the gift of the Spirit, the seal of his adoption in Christ, in whom he is entitled to glory! Thus blessed and adorned, the believer enters on a newness of life, and his feet being shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, he comes up to the altar of the sanctuary, with the sacrifices of joy, for the grace bestowed on him, sits down at the table of the Lord, and feasts on his body and blood, in a delightful prospect of being called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, at his coming.—“Happy man, thus drawn to approach unto the Lord, that he may dwell in his courts, and be satisfied with the goodness of his temple.” No creature shall be able to separate him from the love of God, or exclude him from an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of his Son.

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WE now return to survey the entertainment in view.—*Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry.* The fatted calf on which they feast on this joyful occasion, is by most expositors, both ancient and modern, applied to the flesh or body of Jesus, by the offering of which on the cross, he expiated sin; hence the faithful have peace and communion with God, * as already observed; and though a late prejudiced † author takes leave to ridicule and condemn this idea as odd, unintelligible, enthusiastical, and no compliment to Jesus Christ, it partly agrees with our Lord's own representation, John vi. in his discourse with the Capernaïtes, who, wresting his words to a carnal sense, were in like manner offended; nevertheless, he expressly declares, verse 53. “Except ye eat the flesh, and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you.” And it is remarkable that *δυσσας*, the expression here used, although on account of banquets held by Jews and Gentiles, or meats offered to the Deity, it is sometimes applied to ordinary killing, yet it more properly signifies a slaying for a religious use, and is accordingly rendered *sacrifice*; some consider it an allusion to the offering a sacrifice on the birth

* Sermon V. p. 108.

† How on the parable, p. 244.

of a child, or to the like acknowledgment on the unexpected or wonderful recovery of one given over for dead, which answers to the idea of the father concerning his son in the parable: but if, as some object, the Jews had no such custom, and therefore could not be affected by a reference to either; this is certain, that covenant feasts, and eating of the sacrifice, they well understood. These entertainments were a shadow of the feast of fat things prepared and set forth in the gospel, in which the faithful have fellowship with their God, who hath graciously forgiven them all their transgressions; they feed by faith on the flesh and blood of him that was crucified for them; not that the body of Jesus is hereby supposed to be properly offered in sacrifice on the repentance of a sinner, for then, as the apostle reasons, Heb. xi. 26. he must often suffer; i. e. as often as any one repented and stood in need of pardon, which is absurd to imagine: Christ was "*once* offered, and by that *one* offering, for ever perfected them that are sanctified," so that every pretence to the offering of the body of Christ, as in the idolatrous elevation of the host, conveys a false idea, and is a virtual impeachment of the sacrifice of the Son of God, seeing, if it were perfect, a repetition is needless. But in the representation before us, we have a just resemblance of the joyful communion of saints in Christ Jesus, who, being justified by faith, have peace with God.

God. In a life of faith, the subject is habitually nourished on the flesh of the Saviour, to which his supper is more especially subservient, when the disciples joy in God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom they have received the atonement, and shew forth his death till he come. Before us is a feast in which all parties join, except the elder brother, who, if he may be accounted a party concerned, is yet behind the curtain; the father and the younger son sit down together, with the servants rejoicing about them; and having regaled themselves, and the music being called for, they rise up and dance forth to the pipe, with a cheerfulness becoming the delightful occasion. The Jews are indeed complained of for having "musical instruments playing, and wine in their feasts, when they regarded not the work of the LORD, neither considered the operation of his hands." Isa. v. 12. But this feast is evidently a grateful commemoration of the divine goodness, in which the father and his family unite, and affords no countenance to the riot and wantonness of profane libertines, who abuse divine kindness, and their own bodies in intemperance and vice, while they scoff at religion and providence; the reference is plainly to wedding feasts, or other occasional repasts, in which persons with moral sobriety and holy fear, are decently merry; feasts which are so far from being unseemly in their kind,

kind, that they were attended by our Lord himself, when on earth : these sober entertainments, and especially those that are held upon an honourable and agreeable marriage, may represent the joyful communion of the saints in Christ Jesus ; of which more hereafter.

It remains that we attend to the reason which the father assigns for treating his family.—Table-talk is but too often impertinent, or worse ; but we are not to be silent at feasts : In decent orderly company, it was usual for the generous host to furnish his guests with agreeable and useful discourse, and particularly with the design of their meeting, the propriety of which is obvious : thus the good man in the parable, proclaims the occasion of his noble entertainment : *For this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found.* Who can say with what vivacity, freedom, and a smiling countenance, these words were spoken by the father to his household about him ? it is natural to conceive that tears of joy flowed from an heart full of love, while he made the report, on this tender and happy occasion. It is added, *And they began to be merry.* In like manner the LORD rejoiceth over them he has recovered by his grace, as in Zephaniah, chap. iii. 17. to Zion he says, “ The LORD thy God in the

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midst of thee, will rejoice over thee with joy : he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."

FROM the whole of this beautiful scene we are taught the abundant provision of grace, laid up with a covenant God, and how freely it is bestowed. Here, if the expression may be allowed, the wardrobe of heaven is opened for him that is naked, and the unsearchable riches of Christ displayed, that the poor and wretched, who are ready to perish, may come, " Ho ! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." Ye that are utterly destitute, come ! The God of all grace is furnished with every blessing you need, and is ready to supply you according to his riches in glory. Behold his righteousness is near ; he that believes in his heart shall be saved. Fear not, O trembling sinner, who art sinking under the weight of thine iniquity ! Justification is free ; trust in the LORD, his Spirit shall sanctify and adorn thee : Lo, he waits to be gracious ! A broken heart and a contrite spirit he will not despise.

It further appears, that the transgressions and unworthiness of a penitent are no bar to his obtaining mercy. The ingratitude and vileness of this dissipated youth, is carried to the utmost ; insomuch
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that it is not easy to conceive of a son more base and unworthy ; yet behold, his compassionate father hastens towards him in love, and, upon his humiliation, invests him with every token of honour and blessing. Here, O broken hearted sinner, is encouragement ! The gospel is essentially *grace*. *Grace* and *demerit*, are correlates ; i. e. *unworthiness* and *grace* mutually agree. The man that repents and turns unto God, *can never be too unworthy* for the blessings of the gospel, seeing where sin hath abounded ; the grace of God is not merely equal to, or simply beyond the utmost guilt and vileness of the penitent, either of which are sufficient to the hope of the penitent, and to remove every ground of despair ; but so rich and extensive is the mercy of God in his Son, in whom his righteousness is declared in the remission of sins ; “ that where sin hath abounded, grace doth MUCH MORE abound,” Rom. v. 20. That man is a reprobate who can abuse this grace ; but certain it is, that they only who can say, *I am no more worthy*, are meet for the blessings of the gospel ; the least tincture of merit, renders the subject *totally*, and, except he repents, *eternally* unfit for the grace which is in Christ Jesus. Again,

It is evident that covenant blessings are *united* in the subject of grace. The prodigal, you see,

is at once invested with *all* things which belong to his character as a son ; we behold him instantly clothed, adorned and furnished with every thing essential to the relation and capacity of a child ; true, indeed, things are not huddled up in a confused manner ; here is an orderly gradation ; first, he is invested with the robe, then the ring is put on his finger ; and after that the shoes on his feet ; but the order is given at once for the whole ; and the description supposes that it was immediately executed in every particular. This exactly agrees with the dispensation of mercy in Christ : All blessings in him are, as it were, linked in one chain, in a close and inseparable connexion : They are so in the decree of God, and lie together in the womb of his purpose ; Eph. i. 3, 4. “ Who hath blessed us with *all* spiritual blessings, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” Again, 2 Tim. i. 9. “ He hath saved us and called us, according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began.” So that every blessing is given at once by the Father to the chosen in his Son, from everlasting ; the same is obvious when we view them in the purchase of the Redeemer, “ who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Jesus, the surety of that better testament, by his blood-shedding and death, rendered the promises valid,

valid, and laid a *meritorious*, and indeed a *legal* foundation for their accomplishment, in the vessels of mercy, afore prepared unto glory ; and accordingly they are not divided in their application ; he that is justified is sanctified, and every such holy person is a partaker of the Spirit of adoption, and admitted to every privilege of the sons of God. If the blessing of Abraham, which is precisely justification in the righteousness of God, by the faith of Jesus, is in any sense first, it is so rather in the order of *nature* than *time*. Shew me the man who is the real subject of one divine blessing, and I will point out him who is entitled to every thing that belongs to them who shall inherit salvation ; these may be separated in human systems, but wherever we turn, in the revealed counsel of God, they are not more certainly and clearly united, than richly and freely bestowed.

WE are likewise here presented with that state of communion into which the chosen enter on their effectual calling, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whose blood we have access to this grace, with boldness to enter into the holiest of all, being cleansed from all unrighteousness.”

THE christian may not always find liberty in himself to rejoice in God ; but he has an undoubted

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right to this privilege, and to the means of obtaining it, to which none is more adapted than that appointment of infinite wisdom and love, the LORD'S TABLE ; in attending on which, in a habit of obedience and self-examination, he may expect that fellowship with the Father, in which there is a foretaste of glory.

FINALLY, it appears from this divine representation, that the conversion of a transgressor is at the foundation of spiritual joy ; on this account, *they began to be merry*. It is declared in the 7th verse of this chapter, " there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." And it is a joyful occasion on earth with them who understand the worth of an immortal soul, the miseries of that awful death which is the wages of sin, and the glory which redounds to God, and the gospel of his Son, by these monuments of sovereign grace. The natural or moral good qualities of those with whom we are connected, may afford some kind of delight ; but, what spiritual joy can take place in the heart of a christian over the most amiable relation or friend, however chearful and gay, when he considers that, amidst all his advantages in life, he is dead in trespasses and sins, in a state of enmity against God, and exposed to everlasting destruction ? The joy of a condemned criminal, who is instantly liable to an execution, about
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which he is unconcerned, is melancholy and shocking, and must sink the spirits of a sensible compassionate spectator. But when a rebel is subdued by the Omnipotent arm of the most High, when delivered from the power of darkness, he turns from sin unto God; when his conversion is manifest, in his obedience of faith, and he becomes a visible subject of grace and an heir of salvation; the love of God and man unite in filling the believer with joy: Nor is this rejoicing either in the convert himself, or in those that behold him, like that of the world, fleeting and vain; it is a rational delight, founded in the unchangeable mercy of God, and, like its cause, will abide to eternity, and go along with the subject into heaven itself. Thus life and joy *begin* at conversion: As the prodigal, the servants who were employed in investing the penitent, and more especially his father, were merry on the happy recovery; in like manner, with gladness of heart, the convert is joyful in his God, who hath clothed him with the garments of salvation: gospel ministers also rejoice in every such instance of mercy, as a seal of their mission in the Lord; and likewise God himself is well pleased. In a word, this joy spreads among the saints in heaven, and on earth there is joy, while Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who are each concerned in this wonderful recovery, are delighted in the fruit of their love.

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AND now, my dear Reader, if the conversion of a sinner is so just an occasion of rejoicing, what can be more false than to suggest that the obedience of faith is a melancholy course? Nothing is more common than for young persons to be under a temptation to postpone serious thoughts about their salvation, lest, becoming religious, they deprive themselves of all pleasure, and lead a mopish or miserable life; but, not to insist on the danger of presuming on futurity in this mortal state, in which no individual is certain of an hour, or a single moment, this is a slanderous report on the ways of the Lord; they are ways of pleasantness, in which alone a well grounded cheerfulness is to be found. The joys of salvation, and peace with God, in hope of life everlasting, are solid and durable; nor are the most regular, or highest entertainments of sense to be mentioned, with these, even in respect of present satisfaction and delight, to say nothing of their terminating in that blessed state, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures eternal, at the right hand of God; whereas the pleasures of sin are for a season, and the finally impenitent must lie down in sorrow for ever!

PARENTS, here learn, and copy the mercy of your heavenly Father, in a readiness to forgive even rebellious children when they repent. Indeed the
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pride and cruelty of the flesh are against it ; but our Saviour insists on our forgiving them that trespass against us, as we hope and expect that our sins are forgiven. Matt. vi. 14. and chap. xviii. 35.

It is to be feared, that this essential lesson of genuine christianity is too much neglected ; otherwise, whence those bitter contentions, and threatening animosities among the nominal disciples of Jesus, on account of personal and trifling offences, so justly lamented in every age ? But the example before us is of paternal forgiveness ; parents indeed are liable to inordinate affection, and in some instances may too much connive at the faults of their children, to their ruin ; nevertheless, he must be a stranger to the world, who knows not that some have been inexorable to a child that has offended, and would never be reconciled, which is unworthy the christian : The ingratitude of undutiful children is a sore evil, and highly provoking, yet the compassion of our heavenly Father, in freely forgiving all trespasses, will be a cogent argument with the sensible subject to pity, and to pass by offences of the disobedient penitent, when it can be with safety and honour.

ABOVE all, my dear Friend, the prospect before thee should awaken thy concern to be clothed with

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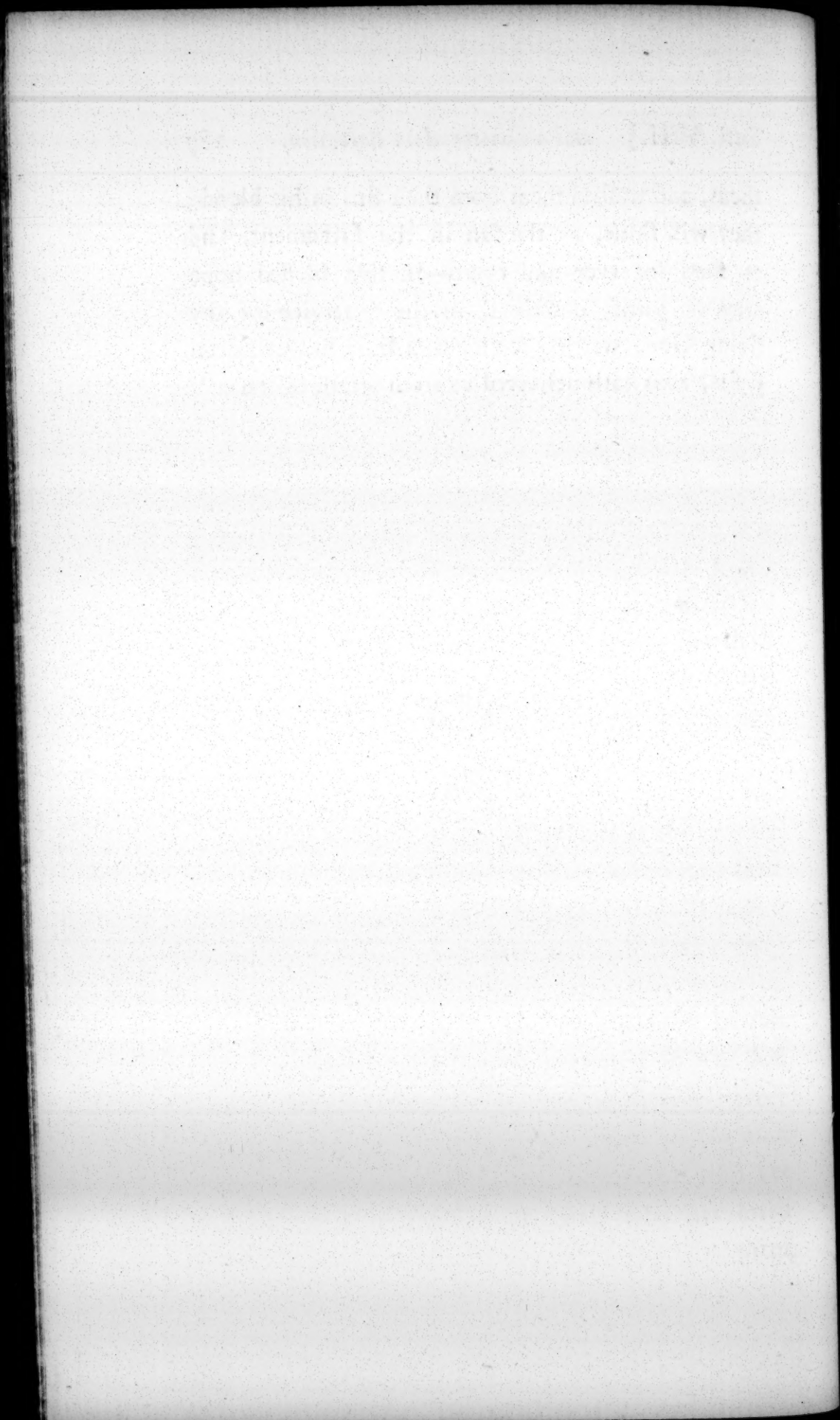
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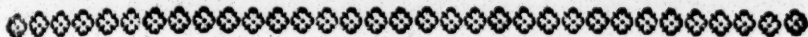
this robe of salvation, that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear: In this alone, a sinner can be justified, and glory in the sight of his judge. He that is not brought with a contrite heart and frank confession, to plead at the throne of mercy, for righteousness and life, according to the promise of a covenant reconciled God, will be found guilty at that awful tribunal, whence the wicked shall be driven with a “depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!” From this tremendous condemnation the christian is safe in his Redeemer; his transgression is forgiven, and his sin is covered; no charge can lie against him, nor shall any creature be able to prevent his admission to the eternal inheritance, prepared from everlasting, and promised to them who love God.

IN a word, how glorious the saints at the appearance and kingdom of their Saviour, when they shall see him as he is, each one conformed to his likeness! —Who can fully conceive the brightness of their glory, in that day, when the LORD shall make up his jewels, in whom he shall be admired? In this perfect general assembly, and church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven, every companion, in his order, will appear in the most consummate point of light; all covered with the righteousness of the Son of God, who has loved them,

them, and washed them from their sins in his blood; they will shine, as the sun in the firmament, and as stars for ever and ever.—In this blessed hope may we purify ourselves, in the “service of the living God, waiting for his Son from heaven, even Jesus, who hath delivered us from wrath to come.”







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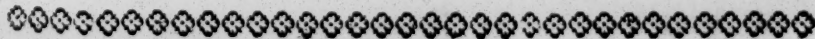
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S E R M O N IX.

Luke xv.—from the 25th verse to the end inclusive.

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing: and he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant? And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry; and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering, said to his father: Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make

make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again, and was lost, and is found.

WE are now at the closing partition of that spacious parable which hath engaged our attention in the preceding discourses. It necessarily contains a variety of objects already explained; but the design, which, among other things, is to vindicate the grace of God from the cavils of conceited men, would be imperfect without it.

NEVERTHELESS, scarce any scripture has been so rarely attended to by the generality of writers. It startled me to find a venerable and judicious expofitor * thus exprefs himself on the place: ‘ This last part of the parable is not so exactly applicable to that

* Doctor John Collin, an ejected minister, whose province in the Continuation of Mr. Pool’s English Annotations, was part of Isaiah, and the four evangelists.

which it is brought to represent, as the former parts are.' Something, no doubt, it represents; but, whatever notion that gentleman had of its real intent, or whatever hesitation in his mind about it, is it not truly astonishing, that a man of learning and piety should utter such words concerning any part of the inspired volume? Nor is it much less surprising that this important branch of our Saviour's intention is, for the most part, so lightly passed over, whether for want of a determinate idea of the leading character, or through an apprehension of its being of no great importance, I shall not enquire; but, strange as it may seem, we have a striking instance of this, in no less a person than the late eminent servant of God, Mr. Benjamin Keach, who out of nine discourses, containing no less than fifty pages in folio, on the parable, takes up only a single column on the whole of these eight verses; which is the more extraordinary, as that worthy writer was not very remarkable for his conciseness; this great disproportion seems owing to the difficulty he found in accommodating every sentence to the system he had adopted; the impropriety and danger of which in explaining parables, upon any scheme whatever, has been formerly observed.

It may be thought rather presuming to proceed beyond the traces of these, and other wise and good

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men, yet, with deference to their superior character, the truth may be searched into; and * especially, when they leave us without a satisfactory account of more than a third part of an allegory, perhaps the most striking and interesting of any in all the New Testament; the doubts or neglects of respectable writers, are rather discouraging, but at the same time a reason for further enquiry; and it is hoped, that an endeavour to illustrate so considerable a portion of the divine oracles, will not be indecent, however deficient or unsuccessful the attempt.

IN the beginning, we are told that *a certain man had two sons*; hitherto the *younger* only has made his appearance. We have seen him return from his revolted and dissipated state, and the gracious reception he met with from his merciful father; and in our last discourse we left them together making merry; now the elder brother is introduced; in whose spirit and conduct, I apprehend, we have a lively picture of the man our Saviour reproves.

WHILE the family were feasting in the house, on this joyful occasion, with music and dancing; emblematical of the joy among saints, on the conversion of a sinner, the other son comes up, and is of-

* Sermon I. p. 3.

fended;

fended ; but before we enter on particulars, it seems needful to reassume, and more precisely ascertain his character, that we may see what manner of person he represents.

SOME would have it, that this elder son is a representation of angels, those morning stars, or sons of God, who shouted for joy when the Almighty laid the foundation of the earth, Job. xxxviii. 7. These are as elder sons of creation, whose existence was prior, and rank superior, to the children of men; but, as hinted already, this is not agreeable to the idea of the draught; these two young men are **natural* brethren; besides, with what propriety can *angels* be deemed brethren to penitent sinners of the *human race*? Indeed the Son of the Father, who thought it no robbery to be equal with God, having graciously condescended to assume flesh and blood, of which the children are partakers, is not ashamed to own them his brethren. Heb. ii. 11. but angels have not this ground of natural relation: These blessed intelligences are ministring spirits, under the Captain of salvation; and we are told, verse 10, that “there is joy among them at the repentance of a sinner;” and seeing nothing can be more opposite to their delight in the recovery of a transgressor than the temper and behaviour of this elder son, on the

* See note, Sermon I. p. 8.

favour shewn to his brother, it is manifest that holy angels cannot be intended.

COMMENTATORS more frequently apply this character to the Jews, who were offended at the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, whom they apprehend is intended by the prodigal; but to this some object, that the gospel had not as yet been preached in the world; therefore, say they, it must be understood of the pharisees and scribes, whose murmuring was the evident occasion of the parable; but, may it not be admitted that our Lord, foreseeing the offence an haughty self-righteous person would take at the encouragement given to mourning transgressors, in reproving these men, warns persons of the same envious spirit, to the end of the world? It is true, pharisaical Jews, and more especially their leaders, were notorious for their aversion to the grace of the gospel, and no doubt, are immediately censured; but the design of our Saviour is to be extended to all of the like perverse disposition and behaviour; and is it not notorious that persons who follow after righteousness, as it were by the works of the law, still cavil at the free grace of God?

ANOTHER sentiment must not be overlooked, namely, that the anger and discontent of this man, at
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the conduct of his father, represents the peevish temper which, through pride and envy of the flesh, even the righteous themselves have sometimes discovered, and it must be acknowledged with shame that there are instances of a fretful and murmuring disposition in them whose real religion, upon the whole, is not to be questioned, and that even disciples of Jesus have been carnal enough to contest the pre-eminence; but whatever vain glory, or unworthy resentment, some christians may have been overtaken with, on certain occasions, it seems inconsistent with the love of God to be offended, and still more to remain irreconcilable when grace is bestowed on the vilest transgressor who repents; but this alone answers to the behaviour of the person before us; he is told that his brother was come, and received safe and sound, nor does he question the fact, yet he is disgusted, and refuses to go into the house, but perversely exclaims against his venerable parent, even to his face. No instance of so uncharitable a spirit can be found among them that fear God. The Jewish converts indeed, took offence at Peter's freedom with the Gentiles, Acts xi. 3. but this is not a parallel case, blinded through a conceit that the blessings of the Messiah were confined to the Jews, which they had imbibed from their infancy, they understood not that the Gentiles were to be fellow heirs and partakers of the promise of Christ; hence they contested the point as
though

though averse to the salvation of their fellow-creatures; but it is to be remembered that they were no sooner convinced of a divine work among them, but their murmurings ceased; yea, they glorified God, saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life! However, under prejudice, the pious may seem destitute of compassion for a sinner, they will naturally and certainly rejoice on a conviction of his repentance.

In short, the elder son is a character in direct opposition to that of the younger, for the understanding of which, as formerly hinted, we are to consider the state of mankind in reference to salvation, who are either *profane* or *religious*; the multitude, like the prodigal, before he came to himself, in pursuit of sensual delight, in a manner, are wholly unconcerned about their souls and eternity; but others, who are in some respects religious, differ very widely; some, being deeply convinced of their guilt and unworthiness, can have no expectation of life, but in a way of free grace, these contrite souls, being taught the ways of the LORD, with transgressors come confessing their sins, and gladly lay hold of the hope set before them in the promise; but there is another class of seekers, if the expression may be allowed, who are indeed separate from the licentious and

and vulgar, and in some respects devout, but then, like the Jews, ignorant of God's essential justice, and their own wretched state, under sin, presume on their works of morality, benevolence, and virtue, for their acceptance, and title to heaven ; thus conceited, they proudly exalt themselves above others, and pour contempt on the salvation of God : Such cannot but be highly offended at the unmerited mercy displayed in the forgiveness and reception of those, who have no pretence to the righteousness they boast, and are, on principle, implacable enemies to the gospel of Christ. And, who cannot see a striking likeness of these haughty men in the image before us ?

HAVING stated the character, I proceed, as in the former parts of the scene, to review, illustrate, and improve the exhibition, in which we are presented with the offence that the elder son takes at the joy of the family on the repentance of his brother, and the father's vindication of his conduct, by which he is silenced ; the whole comprehending the following particulars :

I. THIS son, coming home, discovers the matter, and is highly disgusted *. They who confine the representation to the Jews, interpret this circumstance of their being in the world, and working for life,

* Keach. p. 142.

life, doign to be justified; a strange accommodation to a people separated from all other nations, and among whom still subsisted the visible church; besides, this part of the parable is not immediately concerned with the *legality*, but with the *peevishness* and *ill will* of this man, on the memorable occasion.

IN the scene before us many things are purely ornamental, and a *fine*, as well as *just* representation it is. Universal history shews that, originally, the substance of the great, and especially in the eastern part of the world, consisted much in cattle and fruits of the earth, and that their children and heirs were employed in their pastures and farms; how natural then this circumstance of the elder son's being in the field! it accounts for his absence during the late unexpected and interesting transaction; when he drew nigh to the house, he could not fail of distinguishing the music and dancing, which must greatly surprize him, and being conceited and covetous, as are all self-righteous and hypocritical men, no wonder he was offended, * from the moment

* This disgust on hearing the music, even before the intelligence he obtained, which heightened his anger, seems to bear some analogy to

ment he heard it; his immediate displeasure is manifest, for why did he not at once go into the house? He looks on himself as heir of the estate, and, next to his father, the master of the family; what then should hinder his going in to enquire, and if he approved it, rejoicing with the rest on account of this happy change? It cannot be supposed that he declined it out of fear or modesty. What then but an evil surmise which displeased him, should prevent his going in, and enquiring immediately of his father, as became him, and as would naturally have been the case, in the like circumstances, with the man in good temper? Instead of that, he stops at the gate, and calls out one of the servants, who instantly came forth, and with joy related the wonderful event, assuring him that this was the fact: "*Thy brother is come, and thy father hath received him * safe and sound.*"

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to the affected aversion of hypocrites to any kind of mirth; for men of this cast will frequently assume a rigorous appearance, as if it were a sin to be soberly cheerful on proper occasions; though I rather think, as things are circumstanced, this froward man may be considered as jealous, that somewhat had turned up in favour of his brother; however, it is evident that he was out of temper before the account he received from the servant.

* *ὑγιαινοντα*. *Safe and sound*, one word in the original; implying that the prodigal was now perfectly restored, and that his father

The air of satisfaction and pleasure with which he makes this report, as one greatly delighted, is obvious; the servant seems confident that these joyful tidings would be highly acceptable to his young master; now astonished and grieved at his anger, and to find that he could not prevail on him so much as to enter the doors, as appears from those words; *he would not go in*; and the subsequent, but fruitless attempt of his father!

It has been justly observed that the cruel spirit of this haughty man, is rather coldly rendered in our translation, *he was angry*; the expression *αργιστος*, carries in it an high degree of displeasure and resentment; and the scope of the paragraph demands its full force; from this article hangs a main design of the parable, inasmuch that I apprehend the sentence contains more of our Saviour's intentions than many others in the account; yea, excepting those which import the father's vindication of his conduct, the rest are but as a shade in comparison with this. It contains an idea of a mind inflamed unto a disposition for revenge, and accordingly it is rendered *indignation*, by Arias, Beza, and others, which agree

father had received him in health of body, and also with a sound mind.

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with many scriptures, in which the * wrath of the Almighty is expressed by this term ; so displeased was this haughty man, i. e. provoked and incensed to a very great degree, his heart burned within him, being filled with indignation and envy, at the kindness and joy of his father, on his brother's return, as though he esteemed it unjust, or injurious to himself. It is remarkable that he makes no reply to the servant ; so disdainful a person might think it beneath him ; but anger is often discovered in the countenance ; a sparkling eye, a frowning brow, and sometimes the extension of the nostrils, and other features, betokens this sinful passion ; this is certain, that he discovered a resentment not to be appeased.

I THINK that the offence which self-righteous men take at the grace of God, is the immediate intention of the figure before us, but it may be useful to remember, as hinted already, that sometimes even among real christians, an offended brother will not be intreated, especially when the occasion is the preferment of another, before him, or he proudly conceits that a due regard is not paid to his merit. Alas, scripture saith not in vain ; “ the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy !” And our Lord him-

* John iii. 36. Rom. i. 8. and chap. ix. 22.

self says, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." It becomes us to suppress this vanity of the flesh which still abides in us; and as we profess a good hope through grace, as the sons of God, how careful should we be to shun the appearance of that hateful spirit, which belongs to the children of Satan!

BUT, to return;—Behold, the father himself condescends to * come out and intreat his ill-tempered son. This, some apply to the ministry of the gospel among the Jews, to whom first, the word of salvation was sent; even Jesus himself was a minister of the circumcision; the gospel, no doubt, is a ministry of reconciliation, by which they who enjoy it are exhorted and intreated to repent and come in. 2 Cor. v. ult. And accordingly the Jews are represented as persons invited to the King's marriage-supper, not only to the means of grace; this they had without their consent; nor are they exhorted

* *παρεκάλει αὐτόν*, pleaded with him, as an advocate, in behalf of his brother, that he would shew like compassion and joy with him and the rest of the family on his restoration. It is difficult to say which is most astonishing, the condescension and wisdom of the father, or the folly and pride of his insolent son, who, we shall see, stood it out, and would not be reconciled.

merely

merely to assent to the truth of the report, or to a bare external attendance on gospel ordinances, to which none are admitted, but on a credible profession of faith; they were directed to repent, and come to Christ for life; and it is incumbent on every preacher of the word, to beseech his hearers that they receive not the grace of God in vain. 2 Cor. vi. 1. and accordingly the unbelieving Pharisees are charged with obstinacy for not following the examples of some they deemed worthless creatures, who nevertheless obeyed the gospel of Christ. Mat. xxi 32. But the impropriety of this application will appear when it is considered that, although every one in the ordinary ministration of the word is exhorted to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet no man who answers to the description of this elder son, considered in that state, is properly speaking, invited to appropriate the blessings of grace, which is alone by faith. "I come, says the Lord, not to call the *righteous*, but *sinners* to repentance." Nor does the father offer this son, or desire him to accept the robe, ring, or shoes; they are in no respect suited to one in his conceited condition; he only intreats him to be reconciled to the reception of his brother, and come in, and rejoice on the occasion of his recovery, as became him, on a supposition of his being a just person who needed no repentance: This idea of the case seems to have been too much

over-

overlooked ; and hence, as I apprehend, a difficulty has arose in the minds of some writers in accounting for the father's reply to the complaints of his haughty son, recorded in verse 31, of which in its place.

WE proceed to the return of this angry and querulous man, to the remonstrance of his venerable father, who was pleased to come out, and intreat him. And here is a striking, though disagreeable instance of the most daring ingratitude and folly ! So kind and seasonable a stoop must have melted and turned an ingenuous mind, however occasionally offended ; but, alas, hardened in wrath and pride, this man is inflexible ; all this condescension, patience, reasoning and love, was in vain ; so far from mollifying his perverse spirit, and bringing him to temper, that his passions rise, and the rancour of his mind is discovered, insomuch that in contempt of the wisdom, authority and kindness of so excellent a parent, he flies out upon him, and with a supercilious self-exaltation, most rudely censures him : *Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment.* This is high talking indeed, but in reality cannot with justice be said of any fallen creature ; it is neither modest nor true, yet such is the language of those who trust in themselves that they are righteous, not *excepting* the amiable

SER. IX.] *and insolent Reflections.*

young ruler in the gospel. *All these things have I kept from my youth*; when, alas, it appeared that he had a covetous heart, which is in direct contradiction to the law by which he would be justified. As for this man, he not only boasts in his comparative service, but vaunts as though he was absolutely perfect; no wonder he thought himself highly deserving: To do him justice, his true character is the opposite to that of the sinner, who had spent all his portion in a lewd and intemperate course; he is therefore supposed to have been ever dutiful, diligent, and free from the vices by which his brother had brought shame and misery on himself; a man morally sober and exact, in all his external obedience; noble character indeed! What then? On sober and rational principles, I demand, had he any thing to boast of? Did it not become him to serve his father these many years, or would it have been decent to have transgressed any one of his commands? Should we not after we have done all these things which are commanded us, say we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do? Luke xvii. 10. Alas! who can claim this! But, suppose such an one could be found on the earth; suppose a man was as pure in his nature, and perfect in his obedience, as an angel in heaven; shall he vaunt himself before God? What ignorance, pride and vain glory is here!

THIS

THIS insolent youth goes on with unjust and malignant reflections on his father's conduct, both to himself and his brother. First, he charges him with being unkind and ungrateful to him; *and yet*; mark how this man dwells on his merit; *and yet, notwithstanding, I have so long served thee, and been so obedient*; then follows the pointed complaint; *thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends*. So unkind and ungrateful hast thou been unto me, thy faithful and dutiful son, who hath served thee! The injustice and baseness of this charge will appear in the father's reply, but persons conceited of their merit, are never satisfied with the reward of their doings, which shews, that after all their proud boastings of having served God, they have in fact been serving themselves, and deceit is wrapped up in the bowels of their obedience. But what is still worse, this hardened *workmonger is daring enough to challenge his

* *Workmonger*. The real christian is a doer of the truth; being created in Christ Jesus unto good works, he doth righteousness; yea, it is his profession and business to perform those works which are the criterion of saving faith; but a workmonger is one that offers his works as the meritorious cause of his salvation and happiness, or that goes about to establish his own righteousness for justification in the sight of God, which is vain, and a contradiction to repeated sacred declarations, "that by the deeds of the law, no flesh shall be justified;" and likewise to the grace of the gospel, which runs in these words, Rom. iv. 5. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

father

father with being forward to encourage his brother in his wickedness, which he does without any reserve, and in the most provoking and indecent manner that can be imagined : Thus he proceeds, verse 30. *But as soon as this thy son was come* ; note the disdainful and taunting language ; *this, thy son* ; he saith not *my brother* ; no, he scorns to own his relation ; *thy son* ; thy hopeful son, this thy extravagant adulterous son thou art so fond of ; thy darling, whom thou hast such a regard for, as instantly to receive him into thy bosom, notwithstanding his villainess and guilt ; the particulars of which he maliciously repeats, *who hath devoured thy living with harlots*. Ah, cruel brother ! What unnatural hatred and resentment is here ! But men of this cast basely delight to tear up, and bring to view, the faults of those who have obtained repentance unto life. But this by the way : as hinted, the charge on his father for having embraced his son as soon as he came, is a tacit impeachment of his wisdom and holiness, and a sly and vile insinuation that in thus hastily forgiving, and rejoicing over this profligate youth on his return, he was little, if any thing else, than encouraging rebellion and vice ; and it is notorious, that many in like manner, prejudiced against the gospel of Christ, scruple not to charge the Almighty with giving countenance to sin, by the mercy he graciously bestows

on penitent heinous transgressors; nevertheless, it must be owned that they deny the fact, in the teeth of all the proclamations of the gospel; but of this more hereafter.

IT is not to be omitted that the *fatted calf* is opposed to the *kid* by way of comparison, to heighten the charge: take it altogether, and, will any one assert, that it is easy or possible to conceive a more flagrant instance of indecency, malice and wickedness? What then is to be expected but the keenest resentment?

YET, behold the meekness and wisdom of the father, which closes the scene, and is truly astonishing. *And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine: It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*

IN this wonderful reply, two things are urged in vindication, namely, the *justice*, and the *decency* of his conduct. The *equity* of this proceeding is remonstrated in these remarkable words, *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.* This seems the gravelling clause, at which many stumble; they who deem the elder son a pious good man, and would

reduce his insolence, pride and uncharitableness, to a fault of mere ignorance, and infirmity at most, if so much *, may assign him this portion as the reward of his innocence and virtue; and those who confine this character to the Jews, may easily resolve this declaration into their being in full possession of all the outward ordinances of that legal dispensation, specified in Rom. ix. 4. and to this may be subjoined, which is more than all the rest, their having the gospel first preached unto them: but when the character is extended, as it ought to be, to all hypocrites and self-righteous men, who in like manner are dissatisfied and envious at the superabounding grace of God to very great sinners that repent; the accommodation of the passage is seemingly difficult; hence some would guard it with cautions and limitations that might have been spared, on the observation of Calvin and others, with whom I cannot but agree, having long thought this idea of the place, the most satisfactory and agreeable to the ultimate scope of the parable; which is this, that our Lord is here answering the cavils of self-righteous persons, who find fault with his grace, on their own principles; ad-

* How, p. 285.

mitting the perfect service of his proud peevish son, and his right to the inheritance, on the ground of his obedience, he removes every cause of complaint on account of the kindness shewn his penitent brother, by asserting that it did not at all interfere with his right, and assuring him that he should not lose his reward. If grace bestowed on sinners, in any manner, or in the least degree, injured those who obtain not this mercy, it might be complained of, as partial and unjust, but seeing no man who perishes in ignorance and unbelief is in a worse state, in consequence of his neighbour's salvation, but every man shall have his just due; they who murmur at the free grace of God in the forgiveness of penitent transgressors, must, in the end, be put to silence, which we shall presently see is the case with the haughty uncharitable man in the parable.

THIS manner of dealing with self-conceited men, who think highly of themselves, was not unusual with our blessed Lord; a like instance we have in *Mat. xix. 16*. A man of fair character referred to before, who, unacquainted with the sinfulness of his heart, the righteousness of God, and the spirituality and extent of his law, trusted in his comparative morality, most respectfully inquires of Jesus, “* Good

* *Mark x. 17.*

master, what good thing shall I do that I may have, *or inherit* eternal life?" The answer is, "Keep the commandments." Not that he, or any mere man, in his apostate state, can perfectly keep the commandments of God, or that, as one expressed it*, 'there was any passable road to heaven that way.' "By the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified." Our Saviour is evidently speaking to the man on his own principles, q. d. as the same expounder expresses it, 'the way to eternal life, according to your notion, is plain before thee; you say, man may perfectly keep the commandments of God: He that doth so shall be saved, therefore keep the commandments.' And it is clear from what follows, that our Lord did not intend to flatter him with the expectation of life upon his own obedience, for he discovers the deceit and covetousness of his heart, and his incapacity for doing what was required, on his own view of things, which doubtless had a tendency to convince him of his error, and the need he had of a Saviour. In like manner, in the instance before us,

* Pool's Annotations. The same way of reasoning would have removed all difficulties from the mind of that worthy penman, respecting the speech of the father to his son in the parable, and prevented the paragraph referred to, p. 116.

it is certain, that there is not a just man on earth, that doth good, and sinneth not; no man answers to the account the elder brother gives of himself; it is therefore conceited and extravagant, nevertheless, seeing he grounds his complaint on his own merit and righteousness, as too many do, and presumes to find fault with his father for caressing his once profligate brother, who had no pretence to the same plea; he is considered in this reply as possessed of that sinless perfection he boasts; it is granted that he had been diligent in business from his youth, and never transgressed, yea, and that his innocence and obedience entitled him to the inheritance. *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. q. d.*

‘Son, my compassion on thy poor distressed brother, now returned safe and sound, hath not injured thee at all; grace bestowed on him deprives thee not of thy birthright, or any of its privileges, thou art still my first-born and heir, and thy estate still remains untouched; why then, thus angry, my son, since thine own is secure, and no injustice is done thee? Thy complaints are unreasonable: This murmuring, and these bitter reflections are indecent, and uncharitable; therefore I beseech thee, my son, be reconciled, and come in.’

THE other point urged, is the *decency* of the joy expressed on this extraordinary and interesting event. *It was meet that we should make merry and be glad.* The reason is cogent and striking, *for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.* How inexcusable they who make the nature and fitness of things the test of all truth and religion, and yet hearken not to this way of reasoning, but go on to clamour against the free grace of God!

IT was meet, i. e. just and becoming, thus to be merry and glad at the return of thy brother; his near relation, the deplorable and perishing state he was in, and the perfection of his recovery, loudly call for rejoicing. **THIS THY BROTHER**; the propriety and force of the indigitation, is obvious, and has been justly esteemed a fine stroke in this return of the father to his pert froward son; it strikes both in a way of reproof and argument. We recollect the haughty language of this scornful youth, when complaining to his father of the penitent he had embraced, *this thy son*; he disdains to own him for his brother, and, as it were, taunts his generous parent with the dishonourable connexion: in answer, he saith, *this thy brother*; in which there is an admirable beauty and force, tending to the conviction and shame of this indecent young man;

man ; q. d. ‘ True, he is *my son*, but remember he is also *thy brother* ; art thou ashamed of *thy brother* ? He is thine own flesh and blood ; how unnatural to repine, or not to rejoice, at the recovery of thine own dear brother, once dead and lost, now returned safe and found, beyond all expectation !’

So, then, the murmurer is condemned on his own principles, while the father is vindicated from the malicious cavils, and vile insinuations of his envious and insolent son. And here ends the parable ; no answer *is*, or, indeed *could* be made, to this noble apology. The supercilious accuser seems not reconciled, but he is silenced, and for ever confounded ; he stands self-condemned in point of reason and justice : * For aught appears he remains discontented and angry, and

* No reply being made by the elder son has been thought an indication that he was entirely satisfied, and acquiesced in his father’s will, and also well reconciled to his prodigal brother ; but, with submission, his having nothing to say against this strong reasoning is no proof of his repentance ; besides, had he been convinced and reconciled, it would have been but reasonable and just to have mentioned it, whereas not a word is dropped to that purpose ; and the truth is that, unless weaned from a conceit of himself, he could not be satisfied : The experience of all ages to this day, manifests that self-justiciaries are in the same habit of envy and displeasure at the grace of God.

was it in his power, would have stript his poor brother, and turned him out naked again, as he came, but the father continues to own and protect him, and they go on with their music and dancing, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, and the joy of the Redeemed everlasting. But a more particular improvement of this fine exhibition will be attempted in another discourse.



S E R M O N X.

Luke xv.—from the 25th verse to the end inclusive.

Now his elder son was in the field, &c.——

IN our last we attended to this striking appearance and intercourse with which the parable finishes; a partition indeed but little noticed by the generality of writers, nevertheless, it is equal to a third of the whole, and essential; yea, a principal branch of the important design. Let us briefly recollect the particulars, and proceed to the principal things of which they are a shadow.

THE material new figure is the elder son, who, we have seen, doth not answer to the holy angels, which is the opinion of some, nor is the character

to be confined to the Pharisees or Jews, but applied to every conceited self-confident man, who would enter into life on the foot of his merit, disdaining the penitent transgressor, and is not to be reconciled to his salvation, but will murmur at the free grace of God. In general, here is the *offence* this haughty man takes at the joyful reception of his prodigal brother, and the father's *vindication* of his conduct. It seems the elder son, coming home from the field, as he drew nigh the house, was alarmed by the music and dancing, upon which he calls out a servant, and demands the reason of this unexpected and extraordinary mirth, who, without any hesitation, and with a manifest pleasure, presuming that his young master would rejoice at the tidings, relates the whole affair; but, alas, his disappointment! Instead of being delighted and thankful, he is filled with envy, and a kind of indignation, insomuch that all attempts to conciliate him, were fruitless; the father perceiving his displeasure, condescends himself to plead with him, but in vain; instead of yielding, he retorts in an insolent manner on his most respectful and generous parent, boasts of his long and great service, and how innocent he was, and withal scruples not to charge him with ingratitude, or rather injustice, since, notwithstanding his dutiful behaviour and virtue, he had never in like manner indulged him with so much as a kid, to feast

feast with his friends ; yea, and what is still more provoking, insinuates his forwardness to embrace this *his* extravagant *son*, as he tauntingly suggests, as though he made light of his wickedness, whose crimes he repeats with an air of malice and resentment.

THE scene closes with the father's apology, the wisdom and firmness of which can never be too much admired; he might with justice have severely reproved him for his insolence; but behold, he mildly argues the case, on his own principles, admitting his perfect obedience and merit, by which he was entitled to all that he had, he justly observes, that the compassion and kindness shewn to his brother, did not disfranchise, or injure him in the least; and seeing it was his own brother, a brother, once given over for lost, and as one dead, now returned safe and sound, it was but decent to rejoice at his recovery, and that therefore, instead of being offended, he ought to come in, and join in the gratulations of the family, on the wonderful and happy event. In all appearance this envious and petulant son remains discontented, but in the sequel he is totally silenced; could a man in his circumstances have made any reasonable answer, or justified himself; our Lord would not have been so partial, as to have concealed it, whereas no mention is made of any reply.

Now,

Now, agreeable to the intention of the parable, in this remarkable scene, I apprehend, we have an exhibition of the following particulars, relative to the spiritual state and temper of man, and the ways of God with transgressors, according to the riches of his grace.

I. THAT fallen man is prone to self-righteousness. In this way, the corruption of nature, left to its course, will avail itself of the best which the creature can attain to. It is no small instance of the misery of man, in his apostate state, that if grace prevents not, in proportion to his comparative morality and goodness, he is in danger, through the vanity of his mind, of proudly vaunting himself before God, to his ruin. Man was originally formed under a covenant of works, nor hath he naturally any idea of obtaining acceptance with his sovereign Lord and Creator, otherwise than by his own works; which by the way is no inconsiderable proof of the divine original of that gospel, wherein the hope of the believing sinner is fixed in the righteousness of another: It is true, that this method of justification is a mystery, though in no degree absurd, but it is impossible, in the nature of things, that moral beings, who, from their original created state, have no notion of standing in the presence of the Almighty, except by their personal conformity to his will, should invent the doctrine of salvation and life by the
the

the obedience of a substitute ; and, if it came not of man, whence must it be but from heaven ?

To return, it is not only certain that man, naturally in himself, seeks divine favour by his own obedience, which is very unhappy, seeing by the deeds of the law, “ no flesh can be justified ;” but what is still worse, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, the spirituality of his law, and the evil of sin, he is subject to the pride and vain-glory of his flesh, inasmuch that he is soon lifted up, under a false conception of his goodness and merit ; and though, alas, he comes infinitely short of the glory of God, and is, at best, an unprofitable servant, yet, being free from atrocious crimes, and comparatively regular in his external behaviour, he is given to magnify his works, and imagine that on account of them, he is deserving of life. The high conceits of this elder son, are not confined to the Pharisees of old, or to those of that modern antichristian communion, in which, as observed, there is an arrogant pretence of a redundancy of merit in her eminent saints, consigned to the church, which, if well rewarded, she can impart to the benefit of them who are deficient ; but the same haughty and deceitful spirit is found with many individuals in every age, and under every profession and character. Far be it to give the least countenance to licentiousness and disorder ; the immoral and profane are in the high road to everlasting destruction, and nothing less than

than a miracle of mercy can save them from a miserable end ; but the truth is, that the danger is great on the other side ; if a man's comparative morality, external devotion, or charity, through the native pride and corruption of his heart, becomes his dependance, it will be a *fatal* occasion of his neglecting the only salvation of God ; and he that exalteth himself shall be surely abased. So then the father's condescending apology to his complaining son, which contains a full answer, on his own principles, by no means justifies a conceit of human merit, but is a memorial for our warning, that we deceive not ourselves, with a vain shew. Again,

2. It appears, that men who boast in their merit, or form an expectation of life on their own doings, are utterly averse to the superabounding grace manifested in the pardon of those who have been notorious offenders. There is a rooted and inveterate prejudice in the mind of a self-righteous man against the extension of mercy to transgressors ; even their repentance will not satisfy him ; for besides his haughty disdain of such creatures, it cuts him to the heart that those who have no pretence to the righteousness he boasts, should be equally in the favour of God with himself ; hence he is irreconcilable to the salvation of sinners, and will cry out against it. Such men, like the devil, are ever ready to accuse and vilify their sorrowful neighbour, who

humbles himself at the divine footstool in hope of remission, through faith in the blood of the Redeemer, and, on a supposition of his obtaining it, are not ashamed to find fault with the Almighty, and represent the riches of his grace as unjust, yea, and as tending to licentiousness. Thus the Pharisees reviled our Saviour; this was the reproachful character they gave him; a *friend of publicans and sinners*; because he encouraged them to repent, in a prospect of pardon. The same may be heard to this day against the gospel of Christ, from the mouth of the man who seeks to be saved, and rewarded with life, for his virtue and goodness; he scruples not to impeach the righteousness of God in passing by his own merit, if he accepts the unworthy penitent before him; nor is it any wonder, since, in receiving the man who pleads guilty, the Lord pours contempt on all human righteousness, and exalts his own grace, and the infinite merit of his Son, in whom he is propitious to the ungodly, and thereby destroys the foundation of the legalist's hope; which agrees with the reasoning of the apostle, Rom. xi. 6. "If by grace, it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace."

IN short, the natural effect of self-dependence is to envy the salvation of sinners, and be angry with

God who freely forgives them, when sensible of their evil ; they have lived a bad life, and *damned* they must be, for no other is the language of every complaint against the Almighty for pardoning the guilty ; and, horrible as it may seem, what less is this, than to rejoice in the blood of their souls, or to fly in the face of God, if he will shew them mercy ! Thus he that trusts in himself is a murderer in his heart, and would, if possible, overthrow the counsel of God, who declares his righteousness in the remission of sins, that none might despair ; but of this more hereafter. Nevertheless,

3. IT is highly unreasonable, even for a righteous man, if one could be found, to complain of mercy vouchsafed to the vilest transgressor on repentance. The tendency of the father's reply to the discontent and complaint of his son, was to convince him that he had no just cause for displeasure, but rather to rejoice ; in like manner the objection of self-righteous men against the free grace of God in the salvation of sinners by Christ, has no proper cause in the divine conduct, but proceeds entirely from their own evil eye, and bad disposition. They who murmur at gospel grace, neither understand nor credit the former state of the sinner nor his recovery ; they are wholly unacquainted with the deplorable condition of a fallen creature, and have no just con-

ception of that repentance which stands connected with the promise of remission. If this man had attended to his brother's dangerous state, before he came to himself, or considered that he was indeed *as one alive from the dead; and was lost, and is found*, he must have been convinced of the wisdom and goodness of his father's compassion and joy, and, instead of repining or uttering a censure, would have been heartily thankful and glad. The fact justifies itself; it would have been unnatural and cruel to have rejected his own son, and suffered him to perish for want, yea, and not to have rejoiced when he saw him repent, and humble himself at his feet; and since he *could* and *did* shew mercy and favour to this his brother, unworthy as he was, without any injury to him, every objection must vanish.

INDEED the case of a transgressor in relation to God, is not parallel in all its circumstances with the example before us, which is taken from undutiful children among men; such is the state of the spiritual prodigal, that he cannot repent of himself, or if he could, his repentance would be no satisfaction, as might be easily shewn; for the deists highly presume when they roundly assert that if a sinner repents, God will forgive him: This is more than the light of nature can say. Will any man assert that it is in-

consistent with the all-perfect Jehovah, to leave a creature to perish in the misery into which he is fallen by his rebellion against him? It would then be indecent for the Majesty of heaven to punish a transgressor, and impossible to shew the riches of his grace in a pardon; to suppose either of which is unworthy of God, and what reason itself contradicts. Punishment and pardon proceed on a very different foundation: The punishment of sin belongs to the essential righteousness of Jehovah, as a being of spotless justice; but the pardon of a sinner, who hath obtained mercy to repent, must be an act of pure and sovereign grace; nevertheless, if mercy *can* be extended with justice, the essential goodness of Deity seems to forbid that the penitent sinner should be rejected; however, most certain it is, that where God has been pleased to grant repentance unto life, it becomes him to extend his forgiveness, or the end of his grace would be defeated; and I had almost said, were it possible for a transgressor to repent of himself, it would be impossible for a Being of infinite goodness to refuse him a pardon; but the idea of an apostate creature, whose mind is enmity against God, repenting of himself, is no less absurd than unscriptural. Thanks be to God, "he hath exalted his Son a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins!" Acts v. 31.

BUT

BUT the vindication of mercy to sinners, held forth in this parable, chiefly rests on the equity or righteousness of the divine procedure: This holds in respect of the Father, in the remission of transgressors, through the blood of his Son. It is the glory of the gospel that the law is fulfilled, justice satisfied, and that an honour is done to every perfection of Deity in the salvation of them that believe. Grace reigns through *righteousness* by Jesus Christ our Lord, Rom. v. 21. But the righteousness of God is not the concern of a self-righteous man; nothing is farther from his thoughts; nor doth he find fault with his grace, lest it should not redound to his glory, but because he vainly imagines that it reflects on himself, and that he has not his due, if a sinner is entitled to life: To this a full answer is given in the final reply of the father: *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.* If the complainer was in reality as righteous as he conceits himself, the salvation of his neighbour, in a way of free grace, would deprive him of nothing; the covenant of works indeed is broken by the transgressor, and is weak through the flesh, so that it cannot give life to its guilty subject, but it is in no degree diminished, much less destroyed by the covenant of grace; the law still remains a blessing to its innocent subject, could one be found, but we have all sinned, and
come

come short of the glory of God; yet the proposition is true, Matt. xix. 17. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." If any man could shew a law-righteousness of his own, he would certainly live without Christ. The truth is, that no one suffers in any degree of his natural right, by the sovereign grace of God to another, which is a sufficient reply to every objection against it. This point is illustrated in the parable of the labourers, Mat. xx. If God is pleased to call a man at the 11th hour, and make him equal in glory with another that has toiled all the days of a long extended life, has not the latter his due, yea, is not his recompence full? Whatever a christian may do or suffer, in a life of devotion to his Redeemer, his reward is of grace, and there is a fullness of glory in heaven to satiate his soul, and vindicate the faithfulness of a covenant God; if, therefore, he is pleased, in the dispensation of his mercy and love, to pluck a brand from the fire, and receive a convert, whose days have been chiefly spent in the service of sin, shall any man murmur? What but ignorance and malice can find fault with the forgiveness of a sinner, the salvation of an immortal soul, from everlasting burnings, or even advancing the wretch to eternal glory, if all this grace can, and actually is bestowed, without injury to any? Can any thing be more cruel and base than to
rise

rise up against it? They who have been called to endure for righteousness sake, or in any respect may be said to have borne the heat of the day, lose nothing; nor shall any creature be able to say in the day of judgment, whatever his doom, that he is at all hurt by the mercy shewn to the most undeserving heir of salvation. Then shall we behold the righteousness of God in the kingdom of grace, and every pretence to complaint will appear groundless. No wonder, then,

4. THAT, seeing God hath provided for his honour, in the remission of sins, he is determined to pass by the transgressions of the penitent, according to his word, notwithstanding the cavilling of those who conceit themselves righteous. Indeed the father condescends to come forth and intreat his offended son, he reasons with him on the case; but when he will not be persuaded, does he repent of his kindness and grace to his brother? Is the prodigal deprived of any one thing conferred upon him, or doth the family suspend, or abate their rejoicing? No; he owns him a son, and instead of dismantling the penitent, as one who had been invested in a sudden transport of paternal affection, behold, he urges the decency of his conduct on the occasion, and abides in his favour towards him, and, if I may be allowed the expression, we still hear the music and dancing. This perfectly agrees

agrees with the unchanging love of God to his chosen, and the stability of his counsel in their salvation; the profane, like Esau, respecting his younger brother, who obtained the blessing from his father, may cry out, or murmur, when God has mercy on transgressors, yet the gift of his grace is without repentance, and his language in the parable, with respect to every son he receiveth, is like that of the patriarch, concerning his beloved son Jacob; "I have blessed him, and he shall be blessed."

THIS precisely answers to the forementioned parable of the labourers in the vineyard, Matt. xx. 1. 15. When they who had toiled all the day received no more than those who were employed but an hour, though they had their full due, murmured against the good man of the house, did he hearken to them, or change his resolution? No; he remonstrates the equity of his conduct, and they stand justly rebuked and confounded. "Friend, I do thee no wrong; did not I agree with thee for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil because I am good?" and this is the conclusion, verse, 16, which justifies my application of the passage to the case in hand: "So the last shall be first, and

and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen." Thus the sovereignty and righteousness of God will be maintained in his free favour to sinners; "he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy," and his purpose shall stand. In vain doth proud man vex himself, or expect that because he is offended, the Almighty will repent of his grace; it is no casual or hasty thing, when a penitent transgressor is forgiven; but, according to the immutable counsel of his will, and the result of a well ordered covenant, directed in righteousness, through the blood of the Mediator; and, would it become the divine Father to withdraw himself from his wise holy purpose; subvert his own counsel, be unfaithful to his Son, who was made perfect through sufferings, and contradict his promise in the gospel, in rejecting a penitent sinner, because the heart of a proud fallen creature disgusts it? The conceit is unworthy, and to be rejected with disdain by all who reverence the divine perfections.

WHOEVER, then, is offended, God will be glorified in the riches of his grace, according to his word: He has set forth his Son a propitiation through faith in his blood, and the perishing sinner, who lays hold of this hope, though earth and hell rise against it, shall be saved. The Almighty is not to be clamoured out of his mercy by the dint of their

noise, who presume to exalt themselves, and spurn at their Maker and Judge. Though men and devils roar and threaten, his grace shall abound and reign, through righteousness by Jesus Christ, in the salvation of every penitent, yea, and even of them who have been most rebellious; being washed, sanctified and justified, in the name of Jesus, and by his Spirit, shall be glorified with Christ at his coming, when every boasting blasphemer of his grace, as will immediately appear, shall be cloathed with shame and everlasting contempt. For,

FINALLY, in the end, God, will certainly reprove and silence those who presume to find fault with his will. If any thing can enhance the guilt and misery of those who neglect or despise the salvation by grace, as revealed in the gospel, it must be this; to blaspheme it; and since no dispensation is more becoming the All-perfect Jehovah, whose spotless justice, infinite wisdom, and immense goodness, are all most illustriously displayed in shewing compassion to the unworthy penitent transgressor, nothing can be more highly indecent and provoking, than to oppose or revile it. This strikes, as it were, at the very heart of God, and contradicts his chief glory, which he will surely and severely resent. The Lord may endure with much long-suffering the pride and presumption of those who vilify

vilify the methods of his grace; he may in the course of his providence, by the ministration of his word, as it were, come out as the father in the parable, with his son, and intreat and reason with proud profane rebels, declaring his righteousness in the remission of sins; the haughty may spurn it, but vengeance is sealed up in his treasures for the enemies of his Son. The time is at hand, when Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, in flaming fire, and consume the disobedient; then will our God, who is merciful, vindicate his ways to the confusion of them that now maliciously reproach them; their mouth shall be stopped, and, alas, too late, despisers will behold, and wonder, and perish; they shall be driven from his awful and righteous tribunal, into endless perdition and sorrow; * “but everlasting joy shall be on the head of the redeemed, when the LORD their God in the midst of them shall save them; he will rejoice over them with joy; he will then appear to rest in his love; he will joy over them with singing.”

* Isa. xxxv. 10, compared with Zeph. iii. 17.

S E R M O N X I.

A

D I S C O U R S E,

BY WAY OF RECOLLECTION, ON

Luke xv.—from the 11th verse to the end of the chapter.

HAVING, dear Reader, gone through the several scenes of this beautiful and interesting similitude, with an attempt to explain and improve them, permit me to review the particulars, and dismiss it with proper reflections.

THE general design is to exemplify and vindicate the mercy of a reconciled God, laid out in
the

the gospel; which, however disagreeable to the Pharisee, or abused by the libertine, proclaims without exception, remission of sins to the penitent transgressor, who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. This stands illustrated in the supposed case of a certain great man that had two sons, the younger of which is the principal figure; and the drawing is composed of four compartments or scenes: In the first we have the revolt and ruin of a fond youth, devoted to his lusts, which is expressive of apostate man, with the shameful condition, and miserable end of a profane transgressor. The next scene presents us with a happy and wonderful change; the prodigal, convinced of his wretched and perishing state, and in a distant prospect of possible relief, reasons with himself, and resolves to return to his father; this resolution he forms on a principle that obviates every objection, taken from his sin and ill desert, he is self-condemned, and determines to acknowledge all his transgressions, and own that he is for ever unworthy the character of a son.

THUS the regenerate sinner, duly sensible of his case, and the counsel of God, in respect of salvation, comes to Christ, and presenting himself at the throne of grace, pleads guilty and vile, without any reserve, and subscribes to the law that condemns him. For such is the deplorable state of
I sinners,

sinners, and such the righteousness of God, that no man can be saved, who will not own that he deserves to be damned. In the third part of this divine picture we have seen him arise, *and come to his father*. A sentence, however short, that contains the whole essence of repentance unto life, which flows from a vital principle of holiness in the heart, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and is the penitent's own act and deed, who most willingly turns from sin unto God, and in which he is greatly encouraged in a view of his covenant relation to the Almighty as a father, and his ultimate view is the bread of life. The prodigal, in his return, is met by his father, whose compassion and love are amazing: his bowels so yearn, that when his son was yet a great way off, he ran and embraced him, and having heard his confession in part, he prevents his going any farther, by an order for his being immediately invested with every token of his favour: The best robe, ring and shoes, are brought forth, and put on him, and the fatted calf is killed to make merry; now this we have seen is an emblem of the readiness of a reconciled God, freely to bestow abundance of grace, and the gift of righteousness, on returning sinners, "for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption;" it shews that the blessings of grace are united in their application, unto them, who, being justified by faith, have
peace

peace with God, and are entitled to the privilege of sons, in grace and glory ; and further, as there was universal joy in the family of the prodigal, on the happy occasion, one only excepted, in like manner there is joy among the saints on earth, and in heaven, over a sinner that repenteth.

IN the fourth and last scene, the elder son, who it seems was in the field, during this interesting transaction, returns from his labour, and on approaching the house, overhears the music and dancing, and calls out a servant, by whom he is informed of the occasion ; it highly offends him, insomuch that his father's condescension and reasoning, who also intreats him, are in vain ; conceited of his own pretended innocence and merit, and disdaining his brother, he vaunts himself, and insolently charges his wife and just parent, with having used him ill, and even to have countenanced iniquity itself, by his forwardness to embrace so vile a transgressor ; to this the father replies, in vindication of his conduct, that he had done him no injury, and that it was but decent, in these circumstances, to rejoice on the wonderful and gracious recovery of so near and dear a relation ; all which is to shew how prone natural men are to self-righteousness, that they who boast in themselves are irreconcilable to the grace of God,
but

but that their complaints are without reason, and that, since God has in his infinite wisdom provided for his own glory in the remission of sins, he is determined to have mercy on transgressors, notwithstanding the clamour of the proud, who presume to find fault, but shall one day be convinced of their ungodly reflections, to their eternal confusion.

AND, is this a just exhibition? How malignant the nature of sin; thus to destroy the whole human race! True, natural men are not alike profligate; some are comparatively sober and moral, and there is a wide difference in their external behaviour, as in the case of these brothers; but the design of the parable being to illustrate the grace of God in the salvation of sinners; this young man's condition is an emblem of the real state of its subject: Indeed this representation affords ground of hope to the most rebellious who repent, but it does not imply, nor is it a fact, that all, or even the greater part, of them that are called, are taken from the vilest of men; yet this idea it certainly conveys, that by nature, the spiritual state of every one that is saved, answers to the circumstances of the prodigal before he was changed, and consequently that sin has reduced mankind universally to this deplorable condition; for though where the gospel is sent some believe not, yet they who obtain mercy are a part and

sample of the whole human race. Thus destructive and bloody is sin; it has ruined and murdered every son and daughter of Adam, and covered the earth with its slain! Man, however distinguished in his carnal birth, or in other respects under providence, without any exception, is awfully dead, and lost in trespasses and sins; yea, if grace prevent not, irrecoverably lost! Behold then the evil and bitterness of sin, and bewail the transgression by which it entered the world!

THIS being the state of the case, the power and grace of God are manifest in the conversion of a sinner. What sort of omnipotence can raise the dead? Glorious the power by which a man dead in trespasses and sins is quickened and restored! However light some make of regeneration, the scripture ascribes it not barely to the power of God, but to * “the exceeding greatness of the might of his power;” as though omnipotence was no where so exerted as in them that believe. He that duly attends to the state of a person under the guilt and dominion of sin, and in the kingdom of satan, will soon be convinced that a power is needful to quicken and

* Ephes. i. 19.

raise him, at least equal to what is required to revive the body from the dominion of natural death; and seeing this is the fruit of sin, and the subject a child of wrath, what less than rich grace is conspicuous in exerting this power in his recovery? Seest thou a sinner brought home to God? *he was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found!* O astonishing power and grace! Adore the victorious arm of mercy that effected the wonderful change, in the man who deserved to perish in his sins! And surely the happy subject must find a cogent reason in himself for everlasting admiration, gratitude and joy!

WITH what thankfulness and pleasure then should we embrace the man who is restored, whose fruits are meet for repentance. Far be it to cherish a viper in our bosom, or to receive a notorious transgressor without † scriptural evidence of his conversion; and it must be owned that in ordinary cases time and experience are required unto due satisfaction; but to refuse a person who appears to be changed, on account of his former ignorance and

† *Scriptural evidence*, i. e. practical faith, manifested in his spirit and conduct, as becomes the gospel of Christ, the holy fruits of which are evident in them that believe.

profaneness, smells rank of an ignorant, proud and pharisaical spirit: To stand off from him whose repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are manifest, because he was formerly an infidel or libertine, is to be ashamed of the gospel itself, and to reject the patterns of long-suffering and mercy set forth therein. * If the Lord hath called a man according to his purpose, purified his heart by faith, and in the time of his love spread his skirt over him, though his former conversation was with the basest of men, he is washed, sanctified and justified; and, who shall reject him as unclean? Shall we despise him in whom God delights, as a chosen vessel of mercy, or refuse him baptism, and the right hand of fellowship, whom the Lord hath received? What less is this than an impious affectation of being more holy than the Most High, or a presumptuous opposition to his manifest pleasure in the dispensation of his mercy? Again,

How fearful and odious is a self-righteous man! He appears in the character before us, a compound of ignorance, conceit, presumption and cruelty. If this be a just representation, he is insolent to God,

* See more of this sermon XII.

and uncharitable to man. You see how provoked this eldest son is at the kindness shewn to his brother, and have heard his indecent reflections on his venerable and compassionate father; in like manner the bowels of a man who boasts in himself, are shut up against the penitent perishing sinner, and he is not ashamed to reproach the Almighty, that hath mercy upon him. Shocking impiety and barbarism this! A principle so hardened and savage leads to the most inhuman and cruel behaviour. Alas, a man of this cast, knows not what manner of spirit he is of! If a million of precious immortal souls, or any given number of those he disdains, as sinners, compared with himself, were falling headlong into hell, and his own arm was equal to the work, he would not extend it to save them from the devouring flames, and everlasting burnings; for doubtless he that *can* murmur at the evident encouragement given to returning transgressors, if it were in his power, would rejoice to prevent it: Such is the dreadful natural tendency of a fallen creature's advancing himself before God, on the merit of his own works!

THIS legal hope is so far from disposing the subject to goodness, an essential criterion of truth, that it generates the basest affections, even those which prevail among the damned, particularly *envy* at the happiness of a converted transgressor, who, without
the

the grace bestowed on him, must have been miserable for ever? For ever far be the least tincture of so diabolical a spirit! And, is not this a just and insuperable objection to the doctrine of works? Whatever high sounding words of *moderation*, *virtue* and *charity*, the advocates for it may use, it is a *natural* and *mortal* enemy to goodness and love, and therefore neither worthy of God, nor profitable for men; and can this be from heaven?

HERE then, Beloved, is a standing criterion of real religion. He that is of God, and cast in the mould of the gospel, cannot be offended, but will most heartily rejoice when he sees a transgressor obtain repentance unto life. Come, my dear Reader, try thine own heart; doth it rise against the free grace of God, and art thou ready to complain of his mercy to a perishing soul; art thou displeased that a penitent rebel is invested with the privilege of a child, and a visible heir of salvation? It is a very bad symptom indeed! It may not be agreeable; but, in love to thy soul, I could wish thee in the case of that contrite sinner, who is the object of thy envy and contempt; but, if thy conscience bears witness to a delight in the conversion of a sinner, and that thou art constrained to give thanks for the superabounding grace, which triumphs in his recovery

every

very and salvation, it looks well on thy side ; this is the love of God, and the genuine fruit of the faith of his elect.

AND, is proud fallen man of necessity wedded to a righteousness of his own? why should we be moved at the popular cry against the doctrines of grace, or be ashamed of the gospel of Christ? No wonder that it was from the beginning, it is now, and ever will be, that salvation by grace is an offence and reproach in the world ; for though it is naturally impossible for a transgressor to be justified in the sight of God by the * law he has broken, which condemns him, reason itself being judge, yet while a man is under this native prejudice, and in proportion to his conceit of having attained it, he must be offended at the salvation of one who has no pretence to that kind of righteousness on which

* To quiet themselves under this awful, but undeniable truth, some would have it that the gospel is a kind of new law, according to which they say, God accepts *sincere*, though *defective*, instead of *perfect* obedience, for justification in his sight, this appears to me a vain imagination ; it is neither the language of reason nor scripture ; neither is it agreeable to law or gospel ; yet, alas, this kind of commutation with our Judge, without any warrant from him, is eagerly received, and runs smoothly down, as though the invention of men would certainly avail them against the counsel of God ; any thing rather than submit to the righteousness of faith set forth in revelation,

he depends, and which has cost him so dear. We may then expect an opposition to grace, and that not only from the licentious, who are frequently scoffers, but *also* and *chiefly* from *devout* persons, who labour for life, and can by no means submit to the sovereignty and righteousness of God revealed in the gospel.

BUT, fear not, O thou self-condemned sinner, who art humbly bewailing thy aggravated guilt, and heavy laden with iniquity ! * Thy sins are red as scarlet, and crimson, and great cause there is for self-abhorrence and shame ! Yet be not dismayed ; ignorant and self-righteous people may reject and despise thee ; Satan also may accuse thee of thy former transgressions, and resist thee ; cheer up thy soul ; though hell join with earth to exclude thee, the LORD is on thy side. “ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” Psalm li. 17. Come then, only acknowledge thy manifold transgressions ; come blind, naked, and wretched as thou art, cast thyself on the mercy of God in his Son, who is able to save thee ; there is forgiveness with

* Of this see further, Sermon XII.

him : Behold the Father in this parable, how ready to meet his profligate son, and embrace him ; but not more so than God to shew mercy to them who, being ready to perish, betake themselves to the hope set before them : He will have compassion, O trembling sinner, and pass by thy transgressions ; he will clothe thee with garments of salvation, and cover thee with the robe of righteousness ; he will also vindicate thy cause, and the grace bestowed on thee, to the confusion of thine adversary. “ Trust in the Lord, and thou shalt certainly be saved.”

AND, since the ignorant and self-conceited opposers of the gospel abound, and their prejudices are so inveterate and strong ; since they will envy the grace of God, and to their utmost open their mouths against it, and seek to reproach the Almighty, and the objects of his mercy, let those who claim in this hope, be careful to shun the appearance of any thing that may give the least occasion to their malice and pride. Be solicitous, my Friend, to prove, that thou art the subject of this divine grace, Christ is not the minister of sin. The man under this sacred profession, who minds earthly things, and lives in the pride and pleasures of life, contradicts himself, and is an enemy to the cross ; but he that walks humbly with his God, in holiness and love, being fruitful in every

good work, will honour free grace, and, by improving the unjust and severe reflections of the adversary into an argument for holiness and virtue, disappoint and confound him.

To conclude, if such is the joy in heaven and earth, on the conversion of a sinner, when he first obtains mercy, what must be the triumph of the saints when they are compleated in glory, at the appearance and kingdom of the Redeemer! O the melody of their exceeding joy, when he that loved his church, and gave himself for it, shall present it a glorious body to himself: Then, when “new Jerusalem shall descend from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” the songs of Zion will be heard by her enemies, to their eternal vexation and sorrow, when the mystery and temple of God shall be finished; then shall he bring forth the head-stone thereof, with shoutings; crying, “Grace, grace, unto it;” then shall the righteous rejoice in the Lord, and their souls shall be joyful in their God for ever. “Write, says the angel to John, Blessed are they who are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb.” Rev. xix. 9.

THUS,

THUS, beloved Reader, I have finished my design on this evangelical draught. It affords a delightful prospect and full vindication of the free grace of God in Christ Jesus, to the chief of sinners, according to his word. Permit me to say, that this attempt has not been to amuse, but to instruct thee, and that thou mayest know thy state, and not be deceived; with what success, will one day appear. I am willing to hope that thou art deeply convinced of the baseness there is in the worst of epidemical evils, a *self-righteous spirit*, and dost of all things deprecate the pride and folly of those who reject the counsel of God, to their ruin. If we mercifully differ in point of conversation from the profligate part of mankind, we are highly indebted to grace, and can never be thankful enough; but, at the tribunal of justice, in the last and great day, may your soul and mine be numbered with those who disclaim all pretence to merit in themselves, and plead nothing in their defence but the compleat atonement of Jesus, who died for our sins, that being found in him among the righteous, we may obtain the salvation and glory to which the saints are appointed, at the last and great day; in this blessed hope let us purify ourselves, that, being unclothed of mortality, our perfect unembodied spirit, till Jesus comes, may triumph with the just at the throne in the heavens,

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who night and day, sing the joyful hallelujah, Rev. v. 6. “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. *Amen.*

THE END OF THE PARABLE.



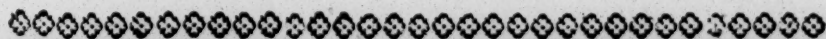
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T H E
PENITENT WOMAN,
IN THE HOUSE OF
SIMON THE PHARISEE.

AN INSTANCE OF THE
RICH GRACE OF GOD,

Represented in the preceding
P A R A B L E.



S E R M O N XII.

Luke vii. 47.

Wherefore I say unto thee; Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

THE harmony of scripture has been justly admired. It is truly wonderful, that a book which contains so rich a variety, in matter and form, composed from the earliest time, in distant ages and places of the world, and by men of such different characters, talents and tempers, should be thus totally and perfectly consistent: This is not to be satisfactorily resolved on any other principle than that of a divine interposition, or the infallible direction of the Spirit of wisdom and truth, under
I whose

whose influence and impulse the prophets and penmen spoke and wrote the sacred volume; it is accordingly esteemed one criterion of its inspiration of God. An instance of the important and beautiful concord of these holy writings we have in the exact correspondence there is between the history before us, and the parable considered in the preceding discourses: They both aver and justify the gracious reception a penitent meets with, at the hand of a forgiving God; the woman before us is an example, and the text a vindication of the compassion and love shewn to poor self-condemned sinners, who come to Christ for righteousness and life; so that the consideration of her case, and our Saviour's reasoning upon it, can be no unsuitable appendix to the original design of this piece.

THE propriety and force of this evangelical passage depend on the context, to which it is needful that we advert; and accordingly our present business will be to review the sacred story, and make some general reflections, reserving a more particular improvement of an address, in which the ways of the Lord with transgressors, who repent, are laid open and vindicated, to a subsequent and final discourse.

OUR

OUR Saviour having preached in a city called Nain, where he raised the son of a widow, one of his audience, a certain eminent Pharisee, invited him to his house ; we might in charity have concluded this a good symptom, it being natural, with Lydia, when the word becomes effectual, to welcome those who dispense it ; but, alas, there are other motives to the entertainment of gospel ministers, than that of love to the truth, or faith in Christ Jesus ; this man appears to be in a state of ignorance and unbelief ; so that ostentation, curiosity, or something sinister and carnal, was certainly his motive ; nevertheless, the Lord accepted his invitation : It seems a public entertainment, which was frequent among the Jews, at which many were admitted to be spectators, who were not called to the feast ; among the rest, behold a woman, that was a sinner, came in, and placed herself behind Jesus, as he sat at the table. A sinner, in the language of the New Testament, is sometimes to be understood of a Gentile, in which view of the penitent, this haughty Jew might disdain her, but it seems rather that she was a person of an infamous life.

MANY presume that this woman was Mary Magdalene, out of whom our Lord ejected seven devils, but with submission, there is no certain connexion between sensual immorality and diabolical possession,

nor can I find a circumstance, in the history of that early and zealous disciple, that impeaches her natural honesty ; it is therefore a groundless conjecture, and no other than a popular error. Others are of opinion that she was Mary the sister of Lazarus, of whom it is declared, by way of anticipation, John xi. 2. that she anointed the feet of our Lord, and wiped them with her hairs ; these indeed are similar circumstances, yet I must take leave to dissent from this notion also ; not to insist on the great reputation of Martha and her family, with the Jews, there are, with me, insuperable objections to this account of the person in our text ; the fact here related was very early, even before the seventy were sent forth to preach, chap. x. 1. it was transacted, we have seen, in Nain, in the house of Simon the Pharisee, when the feet of our Saviour were only anointed ; whereas that referred to in John, is the story of Matthew, xxvi. 7. at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, when the passover was at hand, at which our Lord was to suffer, and accordingly he declares that she performed this office of love for his burial ; besides, that ointment was poured on his head as well as his feet, nor is there any mention of her washing his feet with her tears, as in the case before us.

BUT,

BUT, though we may be ignorant of this woman's person, she was well known to the Pharisee, and it is probable, to many of the company; a transgressor noted in the city, or a town sinner, or is it unreasonable to conclude she was an harlot, or woman of pleasure? This great sinner being convinced of her vileness, and having obtained mercy to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, though not without fear of her state, with an heart full of reverence and zeal, on hearing that the sinner was at meat with this Pharisee, comes in with a costly box of ointment, and making up to the table * behind him, stood there at his feet, melted in her soul, and began to wash them with tears that flowed abundantly from her penitential eyes, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, yea, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

THE sight of a penitent, once notorious for her dissipation and vanity, weeping over her Saviour,

* This woman's situation corresponds with the eastern manner, which is not to sit upright in chairs, with their feet before them, as we do; but they placed themselves on kind of settees, in a declining posture, with their legs stretched behind them; and it is well known that in these countries they walk in sandals, and stand in need of having their feet washed after travelling on the sand and in the heat to which they are exposed.

would have moved a pious heart with compassion and joy, but this Pharisee* disdained her, and could not away with her repentance and pardon; so high ran his prejudices that, instead of admiring the kindness and grace of the Lord, in permitting this office of gratitude and love, from one so unworthy, he perverts it into an argument against him, saying, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is that touched him: for she is a sinner." A thought full of ignorance, pride, superstition and cruelty; notwithstanding the divinity of our Saviour's doctrine, and his miraculous works, this man perversely imputes his suffering so vile a person to touch him, to his ignorance, and urges it against his prophetic character, from whence he concludes him an impostor, as if a prophet was not liable to be imposed on; his reasoning is altogether deceitful and groundless; it goes on a supposition that Jesus knew not the character and life of this woman, or that if he had been acquainted with her, he would not have suffered her to touch him, and consequently he could not be a prophet, all which is false; it is not the property of one sent of God, that he should penetrate the secrets of men, otherwise than by special revelation of the Spirit; Christ well knew this sinner, and all that she had done, and it was so far from

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from being unworthy or disagreeable, that her office of love was highly becoming and agreeable.

THE cavilling Pharisee did not utter his folly, "he spake within himself;" but Jesus knew his thoughts, and saw it fit to reprove them; to this purpose he put forth a parable, the end of which, neither Simon nor his company comprehended. As an example of decency, our Lord makes a motion, "Simon, says he, I have somewhat to say unto thee;" for to him alone he directed his discourse, to which the Pharisee returns, "Master," not *Rabbi*, as Nicodemus, who had a more reputable idea of the Saviour, but *Master*, i. e. teacher, *say on*, not suspecting that he was about to silence and expose him. Then comes the figure; "There was a certain creditor that had two debtors;" their obligations are stated, and great is the comparative difference: "The one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty," yet their indigent condition is the same, they were both insolvent, totally so; "they had nothing to pay;" which except in extraordinary cases, carries in it an high imputation of folly and injustice; when a creditor finds that his ALL is gone, and that there is no composition for his debt, it is provoking; what, in such case, is to be expected, but that the debtor, by a warrant from the magistrate, should be arrested, delivered to the officer, cast into gaol, and there

there confined till the utmost farthing is paid ; and, who cannot see that a man in these circumstances must be a miserable prisoner of justice for ever? And that this will be the portion of unbelievers, who die in their sins, is evident from Matt. v. 25, 26. but with the Lord there is forgiveness for penitent sinners ! Lo ! astonishing, goodness and grace ! “ When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.” This merciful and generous creditor, did not merely forbear to take them by the throat, and hale them to the dungeon, as he might justly have done, nor does he in some measure lessen their obligation ; no, nor only exercise patience, and give them further time to make payment, either of which had been exceedingly kind, and more than they might have expected, though not sufficient to their relief, but he releases them both from the whole of their debt ; he cancels their bonds, crosses his books, blots out the sum which stands against them, and gives them a free and open discharge, never more to require a single farthing of either ; the five hundred and the fifty pence debtor, are both equally, immediately, and finally cleared ; and this alone comes up to the design of our Lord, which indeed is not to encourage the hope of those who have light apprehensions of their guilt, as will hereafter appear, but to illustrate the sovereign and abounding grace of a sin-pardoning God, who freely blots out

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out all transgressions, however numerous and aggravating, for his name's sake, and will not remember the sins of the penitent.

Now, the question is, which of these debtors, thus frankly forgiven, will love the creditor most? To this every man of sense would, with Simon, naturally reply, "I suppose that he to whom he forgave most." Reason and experience unite to confirm it; the Pharisee is accordingly applauded, "Thou hast rightly judged." A man of penetration in things natural and moral, though incapable of discerning the things of the Spirit of God, which is the unhappy case of many, they can reason justly about the things of this life, but are disobedient, and stumble at the wisdom of God, in the salvation of sinners, through faith in a crucified Redeemer.

IN these debtors we have a resemblance of the great disparity there is among the adult, in point of actual transgression, not excepting those who obtain mercy. All mankind are in the same circumstances, in respect of their native guilt and pollution, for, "by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, Rom. v. 18. And accordingly the penitent psalmist, li. 5. bewails his original, in these striking expressions: "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." We are there-

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fore in a state of sin and unrighteousness, from the desert of which it is needful to be cleansed by the blood of Christ ; but the transgressions of one sinner are unspeakably more numerous and aggravating than those of another, and the distribution of justice, in a state of punishment, no doubt, will be in exact proportion, so that it will be more tolerable for some who die in their sins, than for others, in the day of judgment ; and with respect to those who are saved, wide is the difference in their degree of guilt ; for instance, Paul, Timothy, Lydia, and many others, who were strictly moral, and sober, before conversion, might be styled fifty pence debtors in comparison with some in the church at Corinth, who, in the time of their vanity, had been intemperate, unclean and dishonest, though now they were sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, 1 Cor. vi. 10. 11. Nevertheless, these comparatively little sinners had no reason to boast over the great ones, they were all in the same deplorable state, as prisoners of justice ; neither the one or the other had any thing to pay, therefore they stand on the same footing of sovereign grace, being freely forgiven.

BUT the occasion, and our Lord's application of the parable, manifest that his grand design is not to specify the various degrees of guilt among sinners,
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or the need they all have of pardon, but to vindicate divine grace in the forgiveness of notorious transgressors, of which this woman was a remarkable instance, and to silence gainsayers, who, like this conceited man, enviously cavil at the mercy of God to the repenting profligate. Here is no countenance given to those who would plume themselves before God, under a vain notion that they are little sinners, in comparison with others; the forgiveness of the fifty pence debtor is mentioned only to shew that it would not answer the end of a creditor, who seeks the heart of the person he remits, to forgive a small debt, and that it is needful that a man should have much forgiven him, in order to excite and secure that affection for his generous creditor, which is the only source of obedience and praise. Indeed the persons more immediately intended, are Simon himself, and the woman he disdained, because she was a sinner; but the observation is to be extended to the whole world of apostate man, the millions of which may be reduced to two classes; namely, those who, if they have any thought about their souls and eternity, extenuate their guilt, or think themselves indebted, as it were, but a trifle, comparatively to the justice of God, and who are the far greater part; and those who, being enlightened into the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and its fearful desert, be their transgressions more or less, are convinced of

their vileness and guilt, and ready to own themselves five hundred pence debtors, or children of wrath, and everlasting damnation. Thus the disparity of the persons exhibited in the parable, does not refer to the real difference among sinners in respect of actual disobedience, though it lays a foundation of hope in the vilest rebel who repents; our Saviour's intention is the sense or conviction men have of their desert as sinners, and consequently of their obligation to the mercy of God for their deliverance and pardon, for he is shewing that the fruits of love to the glory of our divine Creditor, who forgives all trespasses, will abound most in those to whom most is forgiven.

BUT, to return, our Lord having obtained this confession from the lips of the Pharisee, proceeds to apply this allowed maxim to the case in hand, verse 44. "And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon: Seest thou this woman?" It is not easy to express what may be rationally conceived the effect of this sudden unexpected turn and address; it must naturally surprize, and gain the immediate and earnest attention of the company; and as to the woman herself; what blushing, fear, jealousy, and trembling must it excite in her modest and conscious heart? She might apprehend, that now all her sins and transgressions would be charged upon her, and that

that she should be expelled the house, and also from her dear Lord, with a just contempt and disgrace; or if her hope and the testimony of her conscience, in respect of her uprightness, and love to Jesus, may be supposed to raise her above the torment of fear, how must it affect her to be thus pointed at in public, while performing this office of love? And as to Simon, it is reasonable to suppose him filled with astonishment, regret, and confusion; be it as it may, a comparison is drawn between the Pharisee and this woman, in which the former stands justly reproved for his neglect and disrespect to Jesus, notwithstanding he invited him to his table, having omitted the customary civilities of the country, whereas the poor creature he had despised, had abounded in the tokens of her reverence and esteem.

“Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.” The propriety of these articles will be manifest on adverting to the known manners of the east, especially in ancient times, which, for brevity sake, I forbear. The consequence is a justification of his permitting this poor

despised person, whose former conversation was infamous, on the principle which Simon himself had laid down. Our Lord declares to this man, in answer, to what he must be conscious were the reasonings of his heart, before all the company, among whom it is probable there were not a few of the same evil mind and prejudice with himself, against the aboundings of grace in the pardon of transgressors, *Wherefore I say unto thee : Her sins which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much : but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.*

IN this solemn and striking address, we are to note the happy state of this woman ; how it appears, according to the Pharisee's own way of reasoning, and an observation for the warning of Simon, and all who conceit themselves righteous, and enviously complain against the favour shewn to sinners, on repentance,

I. HE pronounces her pardoned. *Wherefore I say unto thee : Her sins which are many, are forgiven.* Observe, he does not extenuate her guilt, which would have been impertinent, on the principles of the gospel, and in vain, for she was a notorious transgressor, the town rang of her wickedness, and almost every one could testify against her ; and indeed had she not been a very great sinner, she would not

have answered the design of our Lord, which was to proclaim and vindicate the rich grace of God in receiving true penitents, however flagitious in the time of their vanity; he accordingly owns his indictment to be just, or that she who touched him was indeed as vile as he maliciously represented; q. d. Simon, seest thou this woman? behold how she loves me; and is not ashamed in this public manner to testify her affection and zeal for my honour, see how she humbles and exposes herself for my sake; how she weeps and lays down her pride at my feet; observe her cordial and tender salutations, and the expence she is at to anoint me; indeed, Simon, this woman is a sinner; her transgressions have been multiplied; many sins she is chargeable with by the world, and her own conscience doth accuse her still more; as a black and thick cloud, her transgressions go over her head, covering her with darkness and confusion, and are a just cause of self-abasement for ever; nevertheless I say unto thee, her sins, many as they are, are all forgiven, not one of her foul transgressions, or any sin in all, or either of them, lies against her; not that she could offer any thing by way of compensation, she has no plea of merit, but having nothing to pay, and, being for ever incapable of answering for one of the thousands of her errors, committed in the course of a long wicked life, she is frankly and finally

finally forgiven; her sins, and her iniquities shall be remembered no more; and this effect of the mercy she has obtained is, according to thine own way of reasoning; so that,

2. It is evident, on the principle acknowledged, that she is a pardoned sinner; *for she loved much*. It is needless to enlarge in proving that the particle *for*, in this clause is not casual but demonstrative; a learned Writer*, who is not to be suspected of partiality in favour of the free grace of God, or of lessening the power of the fallen creature, confesses it inconsistent with the state of the carnal mind to love God? To assert that this woman's love was previous to her pardon, would be to contradict the apostle's declaration, 1 John iv. 19. "We love him, because he first loved us." Besides, if forgiveness was granted for the love of its object, the pardoned sinner would bear a principal part of the honour of his salvation, whereas it is becoming the all-perfect Jehovah, in the dispensation of his grace, to determine that no flesh should glory in his presence. In a word, to make the affection of the penitent

* Doctor Whitby; yet this has been warmly opposed by some Arminian writers; nevertheless, the connexion requires that we render the particle *therefore* in like manner as the correspondent Hebrew particle must be understood, Hosea ix. 15. "All their wickedness is in Gilgal, for there I hated them." See Dr. Dodderidge, vol. 1. p. 367.

the cause of his pardon, is inconsistent with his being frankly forgiven; and the Pharisee's reply carries in it that the creditor's generosity is the cause of their love, whom he graciously forgives; our Lord therefore certainly intends that the pious zeal of this woman was the effect, and so a demonstration of her pardon. And,

3. HAVING proved this sinner a fit object of mercy, for the reason assigned, our Saviour concludes with this mortifying observation; *But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.* Not to shew that the least, as well as those who are comparatively the greatest of sinners, can be saved no other way than by a free and gracious remission; a truth, they do well to consider who are seeking after righteousness, as it were by the works of the law; but this does not come up to his design, which is to vindicate the mercy of God, in the forgiveness of even infamous transgressors, who are deeply sensible of their vileness and guilt, seeing it produces such effects of love to the praise of his grace. By this remark, Simon, and all who like him proudly conceit that their guilt is comparatively small, are given to understand that they have no ground to hope for pardon in their present state of ignorance and self-confidence, seeing it would not answer the worthy design of a gracious God to forgive them. Jesus
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faith of this woman, *Her sins are forgiven*, and repeats the joyful declaration to herself, verse 48. but he does not say that little finners are forgiven, much less that the Pharisee's peccadillos, compared with the heinous crimes of the sinner he despised, are forgiven; no, here is a fatal disjunctive in the case; so far from inferring that the sins of this haughty man were also remitted, that, on his own way of reasoning no hope is left him, unless, being changed, he is convinced that he had much to be forgiven. The observation in connexion with the premises, is a *but* against Simon, and every self-conceited envious man who trusts in his own righteousness, looking down with contempt on those he deems finners compared with himself, and cannot rejoice, or be reconciled, when such an one repents and is forgiven.

THE argument in this important and interesting passage stands thus ;

THE end of divine grace in the forgiveness of sins, is the glory of God, through the affections of those whom he pardons.

THIS end of the most High in the forgiveness of sins is obtained in proportion to the transgressor's sense of his vileness and guilt.

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IT is therefore becoming the wisdom of God to pardon those who *are*, and *see* themselves deeply sunk in sin and unrighteousness ;

AND, accordingly this poor despised woman, having much forgiven her, most ardently loved the divine Saviour, and thereby justified her acceptance, notwithstanding her former rebellion and wickedness ; whereas they who think they need but little forgiveness, if pardoned, would not answer the purpose of God in the dispensation of his mercy.

A COURSE of reasoning this, which amounts to a most ample and gracious encouragement to every heavy-laden soul, that is ready to perish ; and, seeing the mercy of the Father is in and by his only dear Son, who is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, it may be reduced to this single and joyful proposition, namely ; ‘ Such is the riches of divine grace, that Jesus Christ is ready to pardon, and openly acquit even *great* sinners who come to him.’ A point to be examined with care ; but we conclude this discourse with a reflection or two. And,

I. IF the premises are just, they are wretchedly mistaken who ground their hope of pardon on slight

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apprehensions of their guilt ; nothing can be more contrary to reason or revelation. Is it reasonable to imagine that the Almighty will confer the blessings of his love on those who make light of them, and thereby defeat the end of his grace ? And with respect to revelation, the tenor of the gospel is salvation to them who are ready to perish, and consequently to them only who have a sentence of just condemnation in themselves, which consigns them to wrath and everlasting destruction ; and, is it possible that these apprehensions should consist with light notions of his sinfulness ? A convinced transgressor, and he alone is the object addressed in the proclamation of grace, must either see that he has much to be forgiven, or impeach the justice of God in the condemnation he is under ; but, can this be compatible with penitence or piety ? O, my dear Reader, beware of wrong conceptions, too generally formed, concerning the ways of the Lord with the guilty ; deceive not thyself with flattering ideas of thy comparative goodness, they are dangerous, and destructive to many. If thou art tempted to extenuate thy guilt, or make thyself as little a sinner as possible, that thou mayest be accepted of God, cease from this folly, it is a fatal delusion. To think thou hast little to be forgiven, is to think otherwise than thou art, as an apostate creature, and a transgressor from the womb,

womb, and to cheat thy own soul; the more thou art rivetted in this wild conceit, the further off from the salvation of God; *but to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.*

2. THIS should * animate the penitent, however notorious heretofore in the service of sin, to rank with those who are forgiven, in the communion of saints, without fear of the reproaches of men. He that has obtained repentance unto life, and remission of sins, shall be owned by Jesus, the object of his faith, and has no reason to be dismayed at the disdain and censure of those who envy and despise him; his former transgressions may be maliciously cast in his teeth, to expose and intimidate him from an open testimony of his love to Christ, but he is authorised to every privilege of a son; his Redeemer will own, and support him in his obedience of faith, and in due time, at least in the day of revelation, he will proclaim his forgiveness, and vindicate the righteousness of God, in the grace bestowed on him, to his joy, and to the shame of his accusers. Fear not, O trembling sinner, no weapon formed against thee

* See more of this Sermon XI. p. 248. which may serve to that the design of the preceding parable, answers exactly to this instance of sovereign grace.

shall prosper; the Lord is thy shield, and thou shalt tread on the high places of thine enemy; therefore wait on his name, and be of good courage. Again,

3. HERE is a caution to those who may be tempted to refuse any who manifestly repent, on account of their past wicked life. Indeed we are not to bosom a profligate sinner without proof of his conversion, which may require some time; but having obtained satisfaction concerning the reality of his change, it is against the genius of the gospel to stand aloof from him, or object to his fellowship in Christ. "What God has cleansed, that call not thou common," is a divine warning to us no less than to Peter. Acts x. 15. Shall we pretend to be more holy than the immaculate Jesus, and set them at a distance whom he suffers to touch him, in whom he delights, and of whom he is not ashamed? What better than this supercilious Pharisee, if we slight or discourage the contrite in heart, because of their former bad conversation, who, with genuine marks of their repentance, would bear a testimony for the mercy they have received? and to disdain their tears, or offices of love to the Lord, must be displeasing to him who had compassion on them, and highly unbecoming those, who themselves, are saved by the remission of sins; it is every way unsuitable

suitable to the wisdom and grace which is in Christ Jesus. And further,

4. WHAT pretence to forgiveness have lukewarm and barren professors? If all who obtain mercy, however free from those heinous crimes with which some are polluted, have much forgiven, and it is certain that, *to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much*; they who have no zeal for God, most certainly do not answer our Lord's description of those who partake of his grace, and do well to take heed that they deceive not themselves. It is astonishing to see how dull and unprofitable many nominal christians are, yet secure in a presumption that they are pardoned sinners; but, how does this consist with the doctrine of the text? And, can it be supposed that Jesus was mistaken? It may justly alarm those who, through sloth, shame, or fear, do nothing for Christ, but are totally unconformed to this noble example of fortitude, and self-denial for him that had forgiven her. If such are the effects of his pardoning mercy in the happy subject, O, beloved Reader, flatter not thy soul! Art thou sensible that thy transgressions are many, and dost thou hope that they are all blotted out? let thy charity abound in every fruit of righteousness. Indeed thy goodness cannot extend to the person of the glorified Saviour, but thou canst wash the feet of his poor despised

despised members, and salute them with every token of kindness, which he will surely reward as done to himself; but, canst thou rank with the righteous if destitute of these fruits of love at his appearance and kingdom? And, how awful the disappointment if thou shouldst be placed at the left-hand of the Judge, when he shall doom the disobedient to the misery assigned them!

FINALLY, did Simon stand reprov'd and confounded at our Saviour's declaration concerning this penitent sinner? What shame will cover the enemies of the gospel in the last and great day, when the King from his throne shall confess all his saints, and openly acquit them from every charge! Blessed society, whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered, and to whom the Lord will impute no iniquity! He will compass them about with songs of deliverance; everlasting joy shall be on their heads, with satan under their feet:—Then shall they with boldness condemn every tongue that rises up in judgment against them. "This is the heritage of the faithful; their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord." Glorious prospect, under which each believer may freely adopt the words of the prophet, Psalm lxxi. 23, 24. "My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee:

and my soul which thou hast redeemed. My tongue shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt."



S E R M O N XIII.

Luke vii. 47.

Wherefore I say unto thee; Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

THIS conclusion from the premises, considered in the preceding discourse, is no other than a vindication of divine mercy on a notorious penitent transgressor, from the ignorant and malicious cavil of a proud self-confident Pharisee, on a rational principle, acknowledged by himself, by which he is silenced. It is drawn by the Son of God, whom the Father sent to be the Saviour of the world, in whom alone salvation may be found, and applied to a certain instance of that grace which reigns through

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righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord, whence results this evangelical and joyful truth ; namely, ‘ Such is the riches of divine grace, that Jesus Christ is ready to pardon, and openly acquit, even *great* sinners, that come to him.’

THE chief end of a gospel ministry is to convince lost sinners of their wretched and perishing condition, that seeing their need of abundant pardon, they might repent and turn unto God, and then open the unfearchable riches of Christ, in whom there is life, that they may be encouraged to flee and lay hold of the hope set before them. The above proposition, which is clearly grounded in the text, is subservient to the latter ; and if these papers should fall into the hands of a spiritual mourner, who is ready to perish, may it be the power of God to the healing his wounds, that he may believe to the saving of his soul. However, by this blessed truth we may adjust our ideas of divine grace, and be confirmed in the ways of the Lord with transgressors, to our establishment and joy ; this is needful for all, it being certain, that although comparatively free from sensual pollutions, with which the vulgar are defiled, or less culpable of presumptuous transgressions, than many, no enlightened person, who is acquainted with the nature of sin, and the curse of the law, under which he is condemned,

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can deem himself a *little* indebted to the justice of God ; so that nothing short of this gospel will reach his case. If Jesus Christ is not ready to pardon *great* sinners, no sensible sinner can be saved ; and as for those who are pricked in the heart for daring infidelity or licentiousness, or who have been exceeding loose and profane in the time of their vanity, shall they be discouraged and abandoned to despair ? God forbid ! It is good that these should be comforted, as may hereafter appear ; the Lord enable them to hear the glad tidings, that their broken bones may rejoice !

BEFORE we enter on the point, lest any one mistake or abuse this gracious declaration, it seems needful to observe, that when it is asserted that every pardoned sinner has much forgiven him, and we affirm the certainty and propriety of shewing mercy to the basest of men who repent, we are far from saying that the generality of them who obtain it, have been notoriously wicked, which would be evidently false ; neither is it true that the greater number of bad livers, such as drunkards, fornicators, thieves, covetous, and the like, are brought to repentance, and obtain remission of sins ; no, not one in ten ; yea, in appearance, not one of a thousand, who laying the reins on the neck of their lusts, escape the damnation of hell ; the bottomless pit abounds with

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these presumptuous vile wretches, who have been treasuring up wrath by their iniquity, to be brought forth in the day of wrath, at the revelation of Christ; there is, therefore, not any the least tendency in this rich and sovereign grace to countenance a libertine course, but it is manifest that persons infamous for intemperance, uncleanness and deceit, yea, and in some instances the most bold and mad infidels have been called by grace, according to the purpose of an infinitely wise and holy God, to whom are known all his works from the end to the beginning; nor can a sinner be found who is excluded from the hope of remission on repentance, however immoral or impious he may have been; and there are reasons for extending mercy to great transgressors, becoming the all-perfect Jehovah; I shall accordingly produce scripture evidence of the fact, and then demonstrate the wisdom of God, in these wonderful instances of his sovereign grace. And,

FIRST, The sacred writings abound with proclamations and examples to this purpose. Indeed the mystery of this grace is more fully opened by Christ and his inspired apostles, but in the Old Testament the exceeding riches of God's mercy to sinners is not obscurely laid down. To Moses the LORD proclaimed himself; "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression and
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fin." *Exod. xxxiv. 6. 7.* and accordingly it is written, *Pfalm cxxx. 4.* "With thee there is forgiveness, that thou mayest be feared." Forgiveness without any exception, for them who cry unto him, deeply sensible of their guilt; for he saith, *Isa. i. 18.* "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow: though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool." Again, chap. *xliii.* "I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions." And, further, chap. *xliv. 22.* "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." These, and other like passages, are directed to backsliding Israel, but they proceed on the covenant of redemption, and shew that there is mercy, through the blood of atonement, for the penitent transgressor, and a thorough purgation of all his crimes, however flagitious or provoking; and that this grace is extended to the guilty of every degree, on their first conversion, is clear from *Isa. lv. 7.* "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD; and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

THAT these are the ways of the LORD with transgressors, that sinners may be converted to him as expressed, *Pfalm li. 13.* is manifest in them who have obtained mercy, notwithstanding the baseness of their crimes, and that not only by occasional

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defilements, with which some have been shamefully overtaken as Noah and Lot, but also deliberate habitual presumptuous sinners, have been forgiven on repentance; a most striking example we have in Manasseh, king of Judah; * his profaneness and enormities are almost incredible; this wicked prince reared up altars for Baal, yea, so impious that he erected these abominations for all the host of heaven in the house of the LORD, and even set up a graven image there, and seduced the people to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed, and filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, from one end to the other, insomuch that his wickedness is unparalleled, and all this in spite of a religious education, being the son and immediate successor of the good Hezekiah; nevertheless, when in his affliction he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed, the LORD was intreated of him, and forgave him. David is another monument of superabounding grace; his transgression in the matter of Uriah the Hittite, was horridly aggravating, a complication of crimes the most shocking and vile, at which the LORD was highly displeased, and for which, besides the cruciating pains of a wounded heart, he was severely punished all the days of his life; nevertheless, the

* Compare 2 Kings, xxi. with 2 Chron. xxxiii.

prophet, when sent to reprove him, is charged with this gracious message: "The LORD also hath put away thy sin;" or in all probability the weight of his guilt had sunk him into despair; true, he long lay in spiritual distress for his folly, and went down to the grave wounded for iniquity, yet in the end he could rejoice in the everlasting covenant, by the blood of which he was cleansed, and which "contained all his salvation and all his desire." 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. So then, our gospel stands supported by Moses, the Psalms, and the prophets.

AND, if under the former dispensation, much more since the coming of Christ, this joyful truth is displayed; the New Testament is full of rich grace, abounding to the chief of sinners. John prepared the way by preaching in the wilderness the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Mark i. 4. And no sooner did the Messiah himself appear, but he calls on sinners to repent. Mat. iv. 17. Soon after, in his discourse with Nicodemus, John iii. 15. he declares, "that WHOSOEVER believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And again, Matt. ix. 13. he says, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

IT would be endless to cite all the places that confirm our proposition; it is the tenor of the gospel,
Mark

Mark xvi. 16. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Here is no exception in the blessed report, the promise is free and unlimited; nothing can be more open and universal, and indeed if any transgressor had been excluded, how could it be reconciled to Mark iii. 28? They are our Saviour's own words; "Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewithsoever they shall blaspheme." That is them who repent, and, excepting the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, according to what immediately follows. The same runs through the whole testament, in numberless instances, but none more expressive than 1 John i. 9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

THE instances of grace triumphing over the aboundings of sin, in a dispensation of pardoning mercy, are innumerable; even in the short course of our Saviour's own ministry, besides the town sinner of whom he speaks in the text, what think you of Matthew, Zaccheus, and other publicans, with harlots, who believed, and entered into the kingdom of heaven, by whom the unbelieving Jews are re-proved, Matt. xxi. 32. Their change is not to be questioned, for when our Lord thus upbraids these men with their perverse unbelief, does he not
appeal

appeal to their own knowledge for the satisfactory external evidence these converted transgressors had given of their repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? But that nothing might be wanting to shew there is pardon for the greatest sinners, who come to him; the risen Saviour, before his ascension, commanded, * “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning AT JERUSALEM,” Luke xxiv. 47. If any city or people might expect to have been proscribed, and denied the means of salvation, the place where, and the persons by whom Jesus was murdered, might look for this state; on the contrary, to them *first*, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless them, “in turning away every one of them from his iniquity.” Acts iii. 26. Astonishing, unmerited grace! Remission of sins preached *first* at Jerusalem among them who had crucified the Lord of glory! Nor was it in vain; behold the multitude convinced under Peter’s first sermon, gathered from those who were guilty of slaying that holy just One; even from the children of wrath, who called down upon themselves the vengeance of heaven, saying, “His blood be on us and our children.”——Horrid imprecation! It is true,

* Matt. xxvii. 25.

the sacred history names no individual, who falsely accused the innocent Saviour, or any one whose voice was heard among those who clamoured against his life, "Crying, crucify him, crucify him;" or whose hands were employed in lacerating his body, or in driving the nails through his hands and his feet into the cross; but it declares that * *all* the people were concerned; the cry was so popular, and the guilt of the city so general, that it seems unreasonable to hesitate that some of those who obtained repentance and remission of sins, under the preaching of the word, were actually and personally concerned in the execution of Jesus, and thus wonderfully saved by the blood which they shed; besides, the orders graciously given to publish this salvation, first of all, among these heinous transgressors, amounts to a proof that there was mercy in store for Jerusalem sinners, unless its preaching was in vain; but the word of God † shall not return void; the reason for continuing Paul at Corinth, was, that the Lord had ‡ much people in that city, and it is reasonable to conclude that in whatever place, or to whatever kind of people the gospel is sent, at least some of the company are converted, and saved; I say this decree in their favour, and especially in con-

* Matt. xxvii. 25.

† Isa. lv. 11.

‡ Acts xviii. 10.

nexion with what transpired on Peter's first sermon, is with me a demonstration that their blood-guiltiness was not unpardonable: what a triumph of grace! A risen Jesus is preached, a Prince and a Saviour, exalted by the Father, to give repentance and remission of sins, even unto them who slew and hung him on a tree! Who may not be saved? And, how evident this joyful truth; 'That Jesus Christ is ready to pardon even *great* sinners that come unto him.'

IF no bitterness, prejudice, or cruelty, could prevent the grace of God taking place among them, who crucified the Lord of glory, what man is too great a sinner to be an object of grace? This agrees with his own declaration, Matt. xii. 31. lately mentioned; and of this Paul himself is an instance*, who was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, but saith he, "I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

AND, if among the Jews, are found many great examples, still more among the Gentiles; the New Testament abounds with instances of insuperable

* 1 Tim. i. 13, 16.

grace in the forgiveness of sins. When the gospel first spread through the world it lay in deplorable ignorance and wickedness, being over-run with superstition, idolatry, and every species of immorality, to an astonishing degree; of this dreadful state of the heathen we have a particular and striking account, in Rom. i. from the 9th verse to the end; it is shocking to read of their gross impieties and uncleanness, being justly given up to a reprobate mind; they were, says the apostle, "filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit; haters of God, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful!" Thus awful was the degenerate state and habit of the world, at the time when the Lord visited the Gentiles with his light, that if the most wicked and filthy might not hope for pardon on repentance, it would have been to little or no purpose to have sent the gospel among them; but we know it was sent, and sent not in vain; of forcerers, and those who used withcrafts, and abominable arts, "so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed, we are told, Acts xix. 19. that many of them testified their repentance by burning their costly books, to the amount of fifty thousand pieces of silver." That is, on a moderate calculation, near

two thousand pounds sterling ; a large sum in those days, by which these converted persons expressed their abhorrence and indignation of those things, which had been the occasion and instruments of their former impurities. Also many were sanctified and joined to the Lord, whose former conversation had been exceedingly immoral and vicious, insomuch that in the church at Corinth, 1 Epist. vi. 10, 11, the apostle, when speaking of these who, dying in their sins, should not inherit the kingdom of God, specifies fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners, and adds, “ such were some of you, but you are washed ; but ye are justified ; but ye are sanctified in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” —And in the age after that of the apostles, as appears from the apologies of the fathers, many of the like infamous character were changed by the power of God, through the preaching of the gospel : in testimony of which, those noble confessors appealed to the lives of their converts, and frequently silenced the clamours of those who reproached the doctrine of christianity ; and indeed, where is the age, place, or company, in which like instances may not be found ? True, many are favoured with restraining grace, by means of a religious education, or otherwise, nevertheless, where is the congregation of
saints

faints in which some were not impious and unclean in the time of their vanity? Is there no drunkard, fornicator, profane swearer, sabbath-breaker, liar, or thief, now a monument of mercy among us, who can glorify rich and sovereign grace, and witness that had not the Lord been ready to pardon and embrace very great sinners, they had never been numbered with his people? May such ever praise the rich mercy they have obtained, and confirm their own character, by abstaining from all appearance of evil, and in every thing adorning the doctrine of their divine Saviour!

THUS, from the tenor of the Old and New Testament, and numberless examples, especially under the gospel dispensation, it is evident, that great, yea, very great sinners, who come to Christ, shall obtain pardon. We now proceed,

SECONDLY, to demonstrate the wisdom of God, in these wonderful instances of his sovereign grace; and there are many things which shew it becoming the Father to extend his mercy in Christ, even to notorious transgressors, who are ready to perish. In general it falls in with the character and mission of his Son as a Saviour. 1 Tim. i. 15. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that

Christ Jesus came into the world, ^ato save sinners.*
But more particularly,

I. THIS display of rich grace in Christ Jesus is becoming the wisdom of God, forasmuch as great sinners have most need of help. Indeed all that are sick need a physician. Matt. ix. 12. Every awakened sinner finds himself originally, radically, universally, and mortally wounded, and consequently helpless; he is a dead man, and cannot live without Christ; but the symptoms of eternal death are stronger in some than in others, and the nearer a man is to the grave, the more important and necessary to have advice from the skilful. When a sinner is heavy laden and ready to perish, it is the opportunity of the Saviour. Now, under conviction, a sense of guilt is in proportion to the greatness of a man's sins and transgressions; every instance of presumption and wickedness set home on the conscience, increases the burthen, insomuch that the rebel finds it too heavy, and would sink into hell was it not for a display of rich grace in the Redeemer. So, then, it suits the character of the Saviour, as a physician of souls, to heal even those whose crimes exceed the

* It would be a disparagement to Christ as a Saviour, if great sinners could not be saved by him.

ordinary course of transgressors; the greatest sinners, when awakened, are the first objects of mercy, not in a way of desert, but in respect of their imminent danger; Satan and their own unbelief, through carnal reasoning on their deplorable state, having a greater advantage against their hope of salvation, and to cast them down in despair.

2. BY healing and pardoning great sinners, the name of Christ is magnified and spread abroad, which is another instance of the wisdom of God in this extension of his grace. The more deplorable and dangerous the case, the greater reputation in the cure; in like manner when a great sinner is brought to repentance, and healed through faith by the stripes of Him that was wounded for his transgressions, it is a glorious display of his power and grace, and also his readiness to save to the uttermost, to his honour, and the encouragement of those who stand in need of salvation. Isa. xliii. 25. "I, saith the LORD, even I am HE that blotteth out thy transgressions for my own name's sake." Again, Jer. xxxiii. 8, 9. "I will pardon all their iniquities whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.—And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and honour before all the nations of the earth." This is the astonishing plea of a penitent, well instructed in the ways of a sin-pardoning

doning God, which will bear a repetition*. Psalm xxv. 11. "For thy NAME'S SAKE, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity: FOR IT IS GREAT." When Jesus healed every kind, even the worst of distempers, without any exception, he was famed through the country, and they brought to him all sick people, that were taken with diverse diseases and torments, &c. Matt. iv. 24. Thus when he saves great sinners of different sorts; when the immoral and profane find mercy on their repentance, when such are evidently sanctified and justified in him, by the spirit of life, it is a means of extending his name, and is subservient to the further purposes of his grace, in a lost world: then, as the poetical prophet declares, Psalm cxlv. 7. "They shall abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness, and shall sing of his righteousness;" and sinners shall be converted to the LORD; which leads,

3. To a further instance of the divine wisdom in shewing mercy to the rebellious, when sensible of their wickedness and danger, they seek after life, namely, that none might despair. That Jesus is ready to embrace and pardon even great sinners, is a rational and cogent inducement to every transgressor, who beholds his perishing state, to betake himself to Christ for refuge, from the avenging hand of justice, and lay hold on the hope set before them. One end of God's mercy

* See page 81.

displayed in quickening those who were dead in trespasses and sins, is, "that in ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards them, through Christ Jesus." Ephes. ii. 7. And we have already seen that Paul, who had been made against the faith, he now preached, obtained mercy, that in him Christ might afford an example to them that should hereafter believe. Thus every pardoned great sinner is a monument of sovereign grace for the encouragement of others, that no man might be hopeless on account of the multitude of his transgressions; but that every one who thirsteth may come to the waters, incline his ear, and hear, that his soul may live; and many of the dear disciples of Jesus, now serving God in his churches in hope of eternal life, have reason to bless him for ever, on account of his mercy to this penitent woman, and other examples of his unmerited love, *whose sins, which were many, were forgiven them*; and the like instances are needful, at least useful, in every age, to prevent any man's concluding that his case is desperate, or that the guilt of his bad conversation exceeds the grace of God, which is in Christ Jesus, than which nothing can be more false. But, again,

4. THE wisdom of God is conspicuous in his grace to great sinners, seeing by their conversion
and

and pardon, the kingdom of satan is much weakened, and its destruction hastened on. Indeed there is no sinner turned from darkness to light, and formed by the Spirit of grace into the love of God, but the enemy is in some degree lessened, but bold transgressors and daring infidels, are the great supporters of the kingdom of darkness; when any one of this character is translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, receives remission of sins, and is joined to the LORD, it is a very great blow on the devil; a loss unspeakable to his interest; and accordingly when the seventy returned with an account of their ministry, to their great divine Master, he replied, "I beheld satan as lightning, fall from heaven." Luke x. 18. This he did, when, for his impious rebellion, he "cast him down from his original highness to hell, delivering him, with every apostate foul spirit, into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." 2 Peter ii. 4. But our Lord here speaks of the foresight he had of the rapid and irresistible victory over the adversary, by the spread of the gospel through the world, whereby the nations should be delivered from his kingdom of darkness, and multitudes brought to the obedience of faith, of which their early success was an earnest. Now this is greatly promoted when ringleaders in iniquity, or such who corrupt mankind by their vicious example and seduction to wickedness, or when an enemy to the truth,

who; like Saul the Pharisee, will persecute, and to his power destroy the foundations of the righteous, whose soul he thirsts after, I say, when any such are indeed converted and turned unto God, satan loses great instruments in his cause of error and vice, and his power is diminished in proportion; for besides, that they themselves no longer serve him, their pious example, joined to their utmost endeavours in the service of God, is an occasion and motive to the repentance of others, who behold their good conversation in Christ, and hearken to their counsel in the name of the LORD; thus, so far as the influence of these pardoned transgressors extend, under a divine blessing, the enemy's kingdom is shaken and destroyed. For,

5. WHEN great sinners obtain mercy of the LORD, they are for the most part exceeding lively and useful members of his church, which is another reason why pardoning grace should be vouchsafed to men of base character, when they repent. Great sinners, if really changed and remitted, have been found eminent saints, and singular instruments of the glory of God in their day. None more famous for patience and constancy, under the severest persecutions, or for zeal in promoting the knowledge of Christ, than the converted Jerusalem sinners; and, who more than Paul glorified God, when being called by grace,

grace, he preached the faith, which he once destroyed? Also the woman before us is another striking instance of love to Jesus, and the concern they have for his honour, whom he hath saved from the dregs of corruption and iniquity. Thus a returned prodigal, embraced by his father, will prove a most dutiful son and faithful servant in his house; and this may be expected of those who have been exceeding rebellious before their conversion.

I. FROM the greatness of their love to God, and the Lord Jesus Christ; the reason assigned by our Lord for the zeal of the penitent woman, is this, *for she loved much*. The affections of a pardoned sinner are in proportion to a sense of his vileness, and consequently of the abundant mercy displayed in his forgiveness. Light notions of sin produce little love to God, but when a great transgressor is forgiven, it deeply affects him, and draws forth his heart to Jesus; and, what will not love do for its object? * Love is the leading grace through faith to every good work; hence believers who are washed from the filthiest garments, and who are, in the highest sense, as brands plucked from the fire, often appear the most ardent and profitable disciples of

* Gal. v. 6.

the Redeemer:—Struck with a sense of superabounding grace they are constant, zealous, and fruitful to their power. Again,

2. ANOTHER motive to the diligence of pardoned great sinners is, the injury they have formerly done to the name of God and religion. When a notorious infidel or libertine is converted and forgiven, he looks back with blushing and regret on his past profaneness and vice, by which he has dishonoured the name, now dear to his soul; he would, if possible, retrieve the disgrace and mischief of his vain conversation, from whence he is redeemed; it grieves him to the heart that he has ungratefully dishonoured that God, whose mercy he has obtained, and so basely employed himself in the service of sin; hence he is zealous against those things of which he is now ashamed; by how much the more evil he hath committed, the more concerned he is for doing good; being free from sin he is become a servant to righteousness; and is moved by the consideration of his past wickedness to an ardent pursuit after holiness, that God might in all things be glorified, and the kingdom of his Son promoted, agreeable to the reasoning of Paul, Rom. vi. 19. “As you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.” And then,

3. ONE

3. ONE occasion of advantage to the cause of religion in them that have been enemies to the truth, or of scandalous life, is this, that when converted, their zeal in the service of God and religion, strikes more universally and powerfully, and excites admiration, gratitude and praise. An instance of this we have in the apostle of the Gentiles, Gal. i. 23, 24. The faithful, upon hearing that he which persecuted in times past, now preached the faith he once destroyed, were filled with astonishment and joy; says he, "they glorified God in me." Thus the burning and shining light of those who are animated from a deep sense of their obligations to sovereign grace, for the pardon of their manifold and heinous transgressions, in which they have exceeded, is an occasion of much glory to God, through the holy astonishment of others. Besides,

4. PERSONS called out of darkness from a state of daring rebellion, or a vile conversation unto the righteousness of God, are, for the most part, furnished from their own experience, to be useful to others. In like manner as Peter, on his recovery from his aggravated denial of his Lord, unto repentance and remission of his sin. Luke xxii. 32. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy *brethren*." Converted transgressors are often wonderfully apt and successful in teaching others, in a private or public capacity.

capacity. Such are usually much acquainted with the plague of the heart, the subtlety and power of inbred corruption; having passed through many sore conflicts, both in a state of nature and grace, they know something, it may be much, of the workings of the carnal mind in opposition to God, how convictions from the law are stifled, and the unrenewed heart makes a quick transition from a trembling frame under the apprehensions of judgment to come, as in Felix, to a boldness in fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, and becomes worse than before: They have also felt the bitterness of death, and for the most part, long encountered with reasonings of the flesh, and legal fears against trusting in Christ, and laying hold of the hope set before them, and are acquainted with the method and joy of relief; they have known the supports and consolations of grace, under grievous temptations, and the power of God operating effectually unto the obedience of faith, and in the course of the divine dealings with them, discovered much ignorance and perverseness in themselves, and wisdom and grace in the promises. This experience, accompanied with the love of God, and a just estimation of the immortal souls of their fellow-sinners, fills them with compassion, and constrains them with all readiness to unfold the devices of satan, lay open the vileness, desert, and deceit

of sin, and recommend the unsearchable riches of Christ to others, that they may be converted and saved. They are learned from their own feelings and handlings as it were, to speak a word in season to them that are weary, and teach those who are in spiritual distress. And now, my dear Reader, is it not becoming the wisdom of God to pardon great sinners, who have obtained mercy to repent, "even though their sins have been as scarlet and crimson," and thereby to furnish able, faithful, and affectionate instruments of direction and comfort to the souls of men, and the spreading of his kingdom in the world?

THESE are, at least, some of the principal articles which illustrate the divine wisdom in the forgiveness of profligate and notorious sinners, who come to Christ; great sinners have most need of help; their healing and pardon tends to spread abroad the name of the Saviour; it is an effectual antidote against despair, being a cogent reason for trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, however aggravated the sinner's transgressions may have been: moreover, hereby the kingdom of satan is weakened, and destroyed; yea, and further, such are sometimes found very active and zealous in the cause of Christ and true religion, or most useful members of the visible church; being deeply sensible

of their obligations to divine grace, it begets in them an ardent love to Christ, and inspires them with zeal for his glory, to which they are prompted by the injury their past conversation in the flesh may have done ; this, together with the attention their change may excite in others, to the glory of God, and their ability and readiness to teach transgressors in distress, may be more than sufficient to shew it becomes the Almighty thus to extend the riches of his mercy. Nevertheless, it may be useful to subjoin,

6. THAT it is also a reason worthy of God for pardoning the worst of sinners on repentance, who come to Christ, convinced of their vileness and guilt, that the finally impenitent are hereby left without excuse. Every one to whom the word of salvation is sent, will be the better or the worse for its ministration ; yea, its consequence will be infinite and awful ; not an individual but will be saved, or perish by a preached gospel, 2 Cor. ii. 15. Some neglect the salvation of God, through light apprehensions of their guilt ; they are fifty-pence debtors, in their own false esteem, and have but little to be forgiven, therefore are vain enough to imagine that their peccadilloes may be passed by, and consequently an interest in the blood of Christ is of no great importance. There are others, who, like the slothful servant, are afraid, Matt. xxv. 25. a carnal
terror

terror seizes their spirit, insomuch that they have hard thoughts of God, and rather flee and hide themselves from him, than approach him by Christ; such have no heart to believe, they entertain unworthy conceptions of God, and low thoughts of the salvation in his Son, and therefore despise or distrust him: such, alas, will be condemned for their disobedience and obstinacy, for these rich proclamations and noted instances of grace triumphing over all the hell-desert of notorious rebels, will cover them with silence and shame in the day of revelation; this penitent sinner, the crucifiers of our Lord, and indeed every great transgressor, of which there are many instances in the Old and New Testament, and in every age, who obtained remission on repentance, will rise up in judgment against the man who is afraid to hope in Christ for salvation. Dear Reader, beware of unbelief! There is no cloak for that worst of all sins. John xv. 22. "Boast not of thy comparative morality in a state of alienation from the only and all-sufficient Saviour, for the fearful and unbelieving are at the front of murderers, whoremongers, idolaters and lyars, who will be cast into the lake, which burneth with fire and brimstone." Rev. xxi. 8. And, what says the wisdom of God? Prov. viii. 36. "He that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love

death." An unbeliever will be found a self and soul murderer, and fall into the sorest condemnation, to his fearful and everlasting ruin ; but, " he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved."

O THE depths of wisdom and grace in the salvation of sinners, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, without respect of persons ! A mystery that will employ the attention, and excite the admiration, and love of all saints, in an endless eternity !

THIS boundless and interesting subject may be improved in a way of instruction and caution. Of instruction, with respect to Christ, " who is become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him ;" concerning whom we learn,

I. THE *largeness* of his heart towards sinners. Astonishing grace ! The incarnate eternal Son of the Father, sets his heart on sinful man, to recover and save him, at the expence of his blood ! But that he should thus extend himself to great sinners, even to some of the worst of transgressors, is still more wonderful ; it is not to be fully expressed or conceived. Be astonished, O Reader, at the ineffable greatness of thy Redeemer's soul ! He came to seek and to save, not barely sinners, or sinners comparatively small,

small, or of a middling rank; behold his arms are stretched forth to the basest transgressors! The freeness and extent of the grace of Christ Jesus, is as though a prince should search the jails and dungeons for objects of mercy, or as if a skilful and generous physician should lay himself out for the cure of patients, whose case is the most deplorable and vile. Faint shadows these of the unlimited generosity and love of the Lord Jesus Christ, to perishing criminals, but the lines of his heart are strong and legible in the deplorable sinfulness and aggravated guilt, of some on whom his mercy is bestowed.

2. ANOTHER thing we are taught concerning our blessed Redeemer is, the all-sufficiency of his merit and grace. It proclaims the unsearchable riches of Christ, and his perfection as a Saviour. If a prince was to declare himself ready to supply, in an ample manner, all who are sensible of their need, not excepting those of the deepest poverty, or who are in the utmost distress, it would certainly proclaim, not only the greatness and generosity of his heart, but also the immensity of his treasure; in like manner this readiness of Christ to give repentance and remission to them whose sins are many, without limitation, manifests the infinite virtue of his blood, by which the ungodly are justified, through faith in

him, O the boundless love of Jesus, the inexhaustible treasures in him, as the Saviour of sinners! Well doth he say, "Riches and honours are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness *!"

AGAIN, on a view of this exuberant grace of God in Christ Jesus, even to some notorious transgressors we are led to be cautious both against presumption and despair.

I. TAKE heed of presuming on the triumphs of grace in the pardon of sin, without repentance unto life. Remember the woman, whose forgiveness is pronounced by our Lord, was *penitent*. Repentance and remission are inseparable, in the report of the gospel; "He that has a claim to this grace is one dead in sin, and cannot live any longer therein," Rom. vi. 1, 2. The far greater number of profane and libertine persons perish in their sins, and all immoral and impenitent transgressors go down to hell, reserved to the tribunal of justice. He is the most infatuated and self-deceiving wretch existing, who can conceit that his sins are forgiven in a course of iniquity; their damnation is certain and just, who can sin that grace may abound; the effect of a pardon

* Prov. viii. 18.

manifested to the conscience, by the spirit of adoption and life, is the love of God, and an abhorrence of the sin that is forgiven; so that a licentious professor, however he may vaunt, has no pretence to this mercy; yea, and permit me to repeat, what is still more alarming; the lukewarm and slothful person is as really excluded, and especially among them whose transgressions have been multiplied; our Saviour's reasoning is this, *to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much*; can the great sinner who has no spirit under the name of christianity, who is dull, inactive, unprofitable, be pardoned? The lives of too many, who claim the forgiveness of sins, contradict this declaration of our Lord, but his word shall not be made void. If a very great sinner would prove his conversion, and rank with them who are justified freely by grace, he must not only reform, and abstain from all appearance of evil, but also cleave to that which is good; it is not sufficient that he refrains from these lusts, wherein he once walked; he must likewise bring forth fruits meet for repentance, even the fruits of love to God and Christ, in all manner of holy conversation and godliness, and not to be ashamed of the Lord and his ways. On the other hand,

2. THIS account of the rich and superabundant grace of God in Christ Jesus, is a caution against
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the awakened sinner's casting off hope on account of his numerous transgressions, and aggravated guilt. It is, as already observed, an antidote against despair, under any circumstances whatever. Indeed the abominations of a sinful life are to be detested, and a just cause of shame and self-abasement to the end; they will make the penitent subject dread the thoughts of coming under the sway of any lust; an holy fear or jealousy against those sins which are forgiven, is essential to a justified state; but it is unreasonable and perverse, under these proclamations and instances of grace, with which the gospel abounds, to question my obtaining mercy, because I am exceeding vile. Say not, poor soul, who art tempted, under a sense of thy egregious folly and wickedness, my sins are so many, I fear that they cannot be forgiven, or that Christ will cast thee out; it is a speech against the truth of God, and the gospel of his Son. Can thy sins exceed the mercy of a reconciled God, who will multiply to pardon? Can they go beyond the infinite merit of the Redeemer, and the unlimited full breasted promises of grace? Hath no one been saved as bad as thyself? Perhaps thou wilt answer in the negative; be it so; granting that there is no instance on record of a sinner in every respect, altogether so vile, which is more than can be proved; hath he not said, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out?" And, is he not able,

able, and faithful to fulfil his engagement? Why then will you disparage his grace; impeach his character, yea, and give him the lye? Will you affront Christ to his face, and tell him that he is a poor and impotent Saviour? Is not this to talk like the devil, or a son of perdition? Yet, what other is the language of those fears that prevent a sinner's coming to Christ, or trusting in him, because of the multitude of his transgressions? O Sir, despair is as bad, or worse than presumption; it strikes at the veracity of God, and the merit of his Son, and subverts the whole gospel of Christ; but blessed are they who believe to the praise of him that has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. In hope of being numbered with these happy souls, the Writer takes his farewell of the Reader, with whom may he unite in the triumph of the redeemed, at the appearance and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever. *Amen.*

T H E E N D.

E R R A T A.

Page 5. line 13. for *goat*, read *great*. P. 24. l. 19, 20. for *the intention of the revolted man is*, r. *the intention is of revolted man*. P. 28. l. 6. for *gathered*, r. *gathering*. P. 35. l. 23. dele *blind*. P. 38. l. 20. for *himself*, r. *him*. P. 96. l. 3. for *whom*, r. *to whom*. P. 97. l. 1. for *guides*, r. *guide*. P. 113. l. 13. for *as son*, r. *as a son*. P. 125. note l. 2. for *that*, r. *there*. P. 129. l. 25. for *walk*, r. *walks*. P. 151. l. 6. for *received*, r. *revived*. P. 181. l. 16. for *more*, r. *less*. P. 196. l. 6. for *is*, r. *are*. P. 200. l. i. for *doign*, r. *doing*. P. 202. l. 5. for *now*, r. *how*. P. 207. l. 8. for *justices*, r. *justice*. P. 208. l. 18. for *challenge*. r. *charge*. P. 250. l. 2. for *Rev. v. 6.* r. *Rev. i. 5, 6.* P. 275. in note, for *to that*, r. *to shew that*. P. 289. l. 13. for *state*, r. *fate*. P. 292. l. 7. for 9, r. 19.

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[illegible]

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